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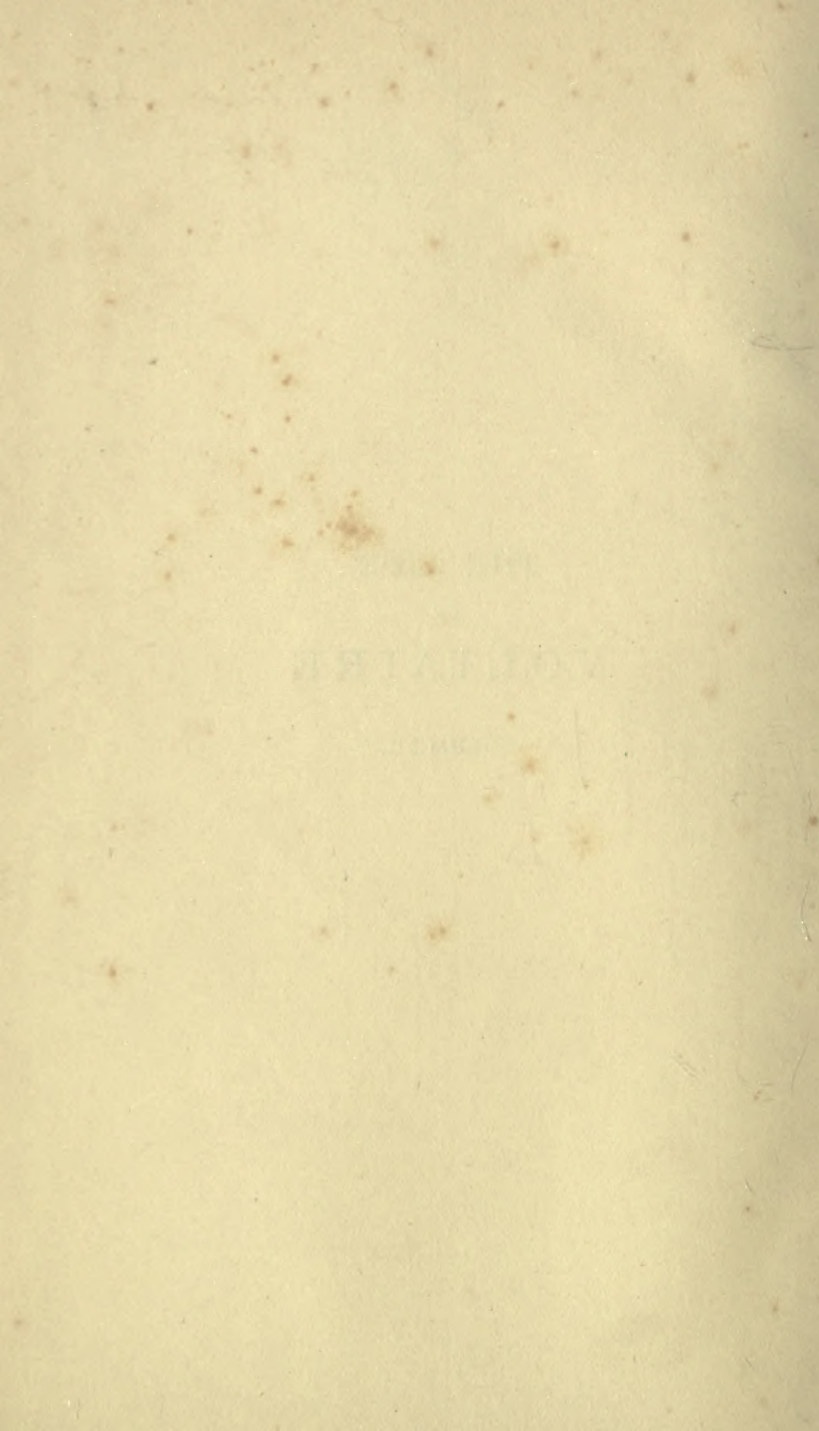


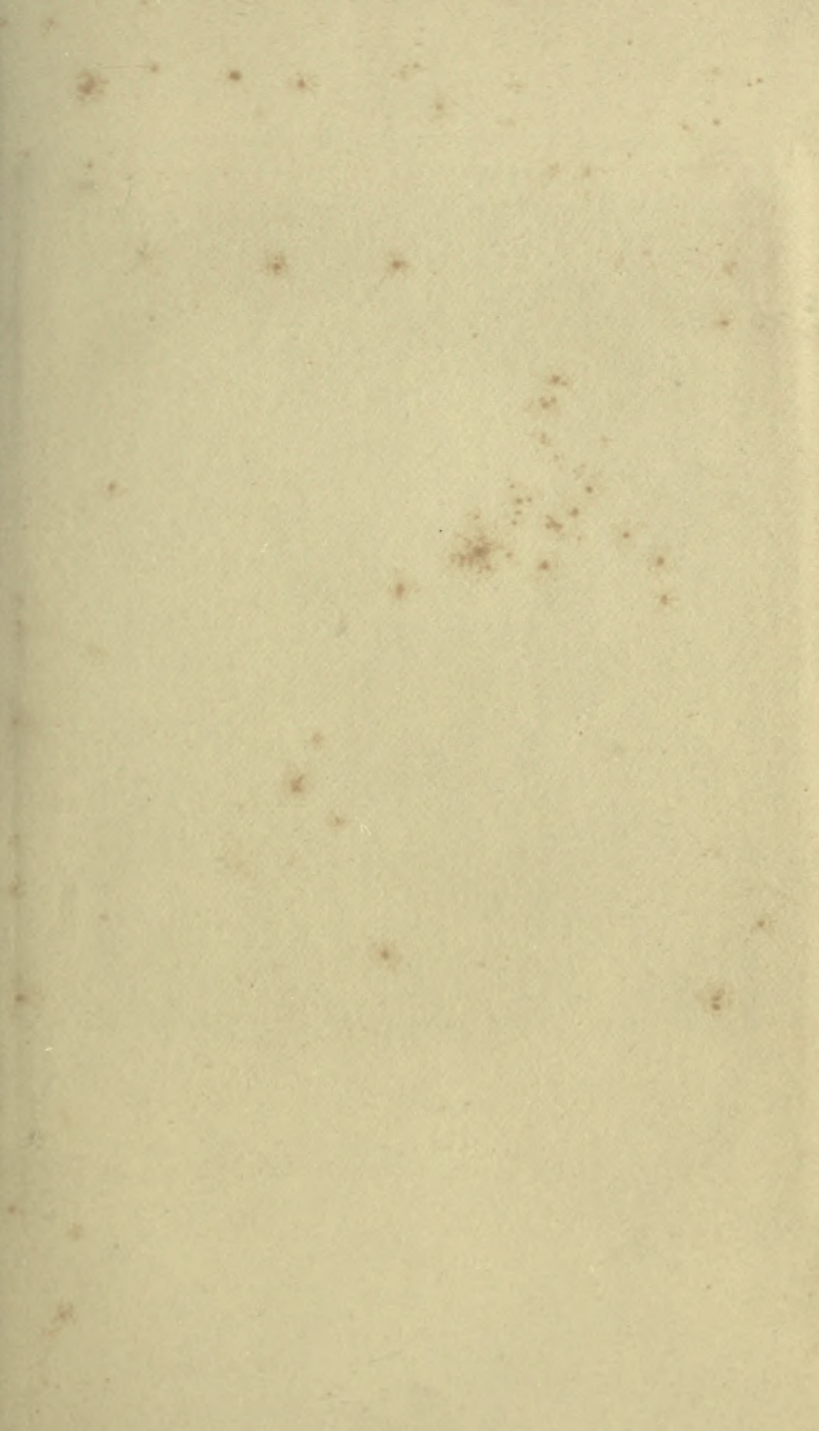




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THE LIFE  
OF  
VOLTAIRE  
VOLUME I.







Walker & Cocherell Ph. Sc.

*Voltaire*  
*from the statue by Houdon at the Comédie Française.*



THE LIFE  
OF  
VOLTAIRE

BY  
S. G. TALLENTYRE  
AUTHOR OF 'THE WOMEN OF THE SALONS' ETC.

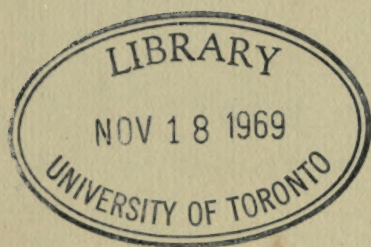
*'Je n'ai point de sceptre, mais j'ai une plume.'*—VOLTAIRE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME I.

LONDON  
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE  
1908

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# THE LIFE OF VOLTAIRE

## CHAPTER I

### THE BOYHOOD

IN 1694, when Louis XIV. was at the height of that military glory which at once dazzled and ruined France, there was born in Paris on November 21 a little, puny, weak, sickly child.

The house into which the infant was born was the ordinary house of a thoroughly comfortable well-to-do *bourgeois* of the time and place. A notary was M. Arouet *père*. His father had been a prosperous linen-draper; and Arouet the son, shrewd and thrifty in affairs, had bought, after the custom of his time and his profession, first one post and then another, until he was a man of some wealth and, for his class, of some position. Among his clients he could number the Dukes of Sully and of Richelieu, memoir-writing Saint-Simon, the poet Boileau, and the immortal Ninon de l'Enclos. He had a country house at Châtenay, five miles from Paris. Plenty of sound common-sense, liberal, practical, hospitable; just enough taste for literature to enjoy a doze over a book in the evening when his day's labour was done; eminently respected and respectable; decently

acquiescing in the national religion as such, and with no particular faith in anything but hard work and monetary prudence ; not a little hasty in temper and deadly obstinate—such was Maître Arouet.

At thirty-four years old he had been prosperous enough to marry one Mademoiselle d'Aumard, of Poitou, whose gentle birth and a certain refinement of type, not at all shared by her husband, formed the chief part of her dowry. The biographers of her younger son have done their best to prove the d'Aumard family something more noble, and the Arouet family something less *bourgeois*, than they were. They need not have troubled. The man who afterwards called himself Voltaire valued his ancestry not at all, and owed it nothing. The most painstaking research has been unable to prove that there was a single one of his forbears who had the smallest taste for literature, or mental endowments above the common. Some have pretended that he owed to his mother the delicacy of his wit, as he certainly owed to her the delicacy of his body. Beyond the fact that she was the friend of her husband's brilliant and too famous client Ninon, and of three abbés—clever, musical, and profligate—who were the *amis de la maison* Arouet and always about it, the theory is without the smallest foundation. Her great son does not mention her half a dozen times in that vast bulk of writings he left the world. To him she was but a shadow ; to the world she must needs be but a shadow too.

She had two living children when this last frail baby was born on that November Sunday—Armand of ten and Catherine of nine. She had lost two infants, and she never really recovered this last one's birth.

He himself had at the first but a poor chance of life.



He was hurriedly baptised on Monday, November 22, 1694, by the names of François Marie. Every morning the *nourrice* came down from the attic where she tended him to say he could not live an hour. And every day one of those abbés, who had taken on himself the office of godfather and was called Châteauneuf, ran up to the attic to see the baby and suggest remedies to the nurse.

Perhaps the nurse did not try the remedies. At any rate, the puny infant disappointed the expectations of his relatives, and lived. Zozo they called him, or, from the wilfulness of his baby temper, 'le petit volontaire.' Châteauneuf's interest in him increased daily. He must have detected an extraordinarily precocious intelligence in the small creature, since, when he was but three years old, the abbé had begun to perform his godfatherly duties as he understood them, and to teach the child a certain ribald deistical poem by J. B. Rousseau called 'Le Moisade.'

It is not too much to say that at this period, and for about a hundred years afterwards, the name of abbé was synonymous with that of scoundrel. Free liver and free thinker, gay, base, and witty—'qui n'était d'église que pour les bénéfices,' as that little godson said of him hereafter—Châteauneuf was not worse than most of his kind, and perhaps, if anything, was rather better. He accepted, indeed, the emoluments of a religion in which he did not only not believe but at which he openly scoffed in order to live at his ease a life quite profligate and disreputable. It is said, or he said, that he had the honour of being Ninon de l'Enclos' last lover. But he was both goodnatured and kindhearted, and after his fashion was really fond of the little godson and doing his best to lead his baby mind away from a superstition which he himself had found, to be sure, tolerably profitable.

What a strange picture it is! This child lisped scoffings as other children lisp prayers. He had very big brown eyes, bright with intelligence, in his little, wizened, old man's face. The precocity greatly entertained Châteauneuf. Père Arouet may have been amused too, in private, at this infant unbeliever—the state of the Church making it hard then for any man, at once honest and reasonable, to put faith in her teachings. The society of her three abbés and her Ninon must have made delicate Madame pretty used to free thought.

So the little boy learnt his 'Moïsade' by heart and was taught to read out of the 'Fables' of La Fontaine.

He was but seven when his mother died. Sister Catherine of sixteen was already thinking of a *dot* and a husband as a prudent French girl should. Brother Armand of seventeen—'my Jansenist of a brother'—had imbibed extreme religious opinions at the seminary of Saint Magloire and was an austere youthful bigot.

So Zozo scrambled up as best he might among mortgages, bonds, and shares; designed from the first by his father to be *avocat* (wherein the family influence would be powerful to help him), a lonely and precocious little creature, and still the infant *protégé* of Châteauneuf.

In the December of 1704, when he was ten years old, he first affixed his name—his baby name of Zozo—to a letter which brother Armand dutifully wrote at his father's request to wish an aunt in Poitou the compliments of the New Year 1705. That letter may be taken as the small beginning of one of the most enormous correspondences in the world, which new discoveries are still increasing in bulk, and which, as has been said, seems likely to go on increasing until the Day of Judgment.

In that very same year 1704, Zozo was sent to the Jesuit College of St. Louis-le-Grand as a parlour boarder. The school was only a few minutes' walk from his own home. But in that home there was no one to look after him save the busy middle-aged notary fully occupied in affairs. Catherine was married. Armand had already succeeded in repelling a volatile child's spirit with his narrow harshness. So Zozo went to school, and took up his place in the very lowest class.

St. Louis-le-Grand—'the Eton of France'—had two thousand pupils mostly belonging to the French aristocracy. Louis XIV. had visited it, and left it his name. It was entirely under Jesuit influence, and taught, or omitted to teach, exactly according to the royal pleasure and the fashion of the day.

A very thin-faced, keen-witted little youth was its new ten-year-old scholar. It did not take him long to conceive a passion for Cicero, for Horace, and for Virgil. He soon discovered that he was learning 'neither the constitution nor interests of my country: not a word of mathematics or of sound philosophy. I learnt Latin and nonsense.' But he applied himself to that 'Latin and nonsense' with that passionate voracity for information, useful or useless, good, bad, or indifferent, which he retained till his death. He must have been one of the quickest boys that ever Jesuit master taught. He had an intelligence like an arrow—and an arrow which always went straight to the mark. Before he was eleven he was writing bad verses with a facility and enthusiasm alike extraordinary. The masters were, with one exception, his friends and admirers. While the other boys were at their games this one would walk and talk with the Fathers; and when they told him that



he should play like the others, he looked up with those brilliant eyes that lighted the little, lean, sallow face like leaping flames—‘Everybody must jump after his own fashion,’ said he.

His especial tutor was a certain Abbé d’Olivet, then a young man, for whom the promising little scholar conceived a lifelong friendship. Another tutor, called Tournemine, was also first the boy’s teacher and then his pupil. Yet another Father, called Porée, would listen long and late to the child’s sharp questions on history and politics. ‘That boy,’ said he, ‘wants to weigh the great questions of Europe in his little scales.’

He had friends among the boys too, as well as the masters. It was at school he met the d’Argensons—afterwards powers to help him in the French Government—Cideville, and d’Argental his lifelong friend, whom he called his guardian angel.

In 1705 those fluent verses he had written came to the notice of Godpapa Châteauneuf. As a reward the abbé took him to see Ninon de l’Enclos, that marvellous woman who was as charming at eighty as at eighteen, who ‘looked on love as a pleasure which bound her to no duties and on friendship as something sacred,’ and was in some sort an answer to her own prayer, ‘God make me an honest man but never an honest woman!’ She received the child in the midst of her brilliant circle with that infinite tact and kindness which have made her as immortal as her frailties. His bright, quick answers, his self-confidence, his childish store of information delighted her. Châteauneuf said that she saw in him ‘the germ of a great man.’ Perhaps she did. When she died a few months later, she left him two thousand francs in her will, with which to buy books.

And the 'great man,' many years after, wrote an account of the interview as if it had happened yesterday.

He went back to school after that episode, and learnt, and knew he was learning, though he was only twelve years old, 'a prodigious number of things' for which he had no talent.

Porée taught him a good deal of Latin, and the primers a very little Greek. He learnt no history, no science, and no modern languages. That he acquired a knowledge of the history and government of France is as undoubted as that he was never formally taught it.

Young Abbé d'Olivet inspired him with his own love of Cicero. Châteauneuf had taught his godson to worship Corneille; and young Arouet championed him valiantly against Father Tournemine's dear hero, Racine.

Other seeds which Châteauneuf had sown in a childish heart were growing and ripening fast. His one enemy among the masters, Father Lejay, answered a too brilliant and too daring retort with the words 'Wretch! you will one day be the standard-bearer of Deism in France!'

The enterprising Deist was still only twelve when, encouraged by Ninon's pension perhaps and the success of some impromptu verses made in class, he attempted a tragedy called 'Amulius and Numitor.' He burnt it hereafter—very wisely no doubt. But verse-making was in his blood, though his blood was Maître Arouet's and the noble, dull Aumards' of Poitou. Play-acting at the school prize-givings encouraged a love of the drama, also inborn. François Marie Arouet was still only twelve when he wrote a versified petition to Louis XIV. to grant an old soldier a pension, wherein the compliments were so delicately turned as to attract



the momentary attention of the best flattered monarch who ever sat upon a throne. The old soldier obtained his pension, and François Marie enough fame and flattery to turn a youthful head.

When he was fifteen, in 1709, Châteauneuf died, Malplaquet was lost, and France starving to pay for her defeats. In the midst of that bitter winter of famine, when young Arouet's high place in class always kept him away from the comforting stove, he called out to the lucky dullard who was always near it, 'Get out, or I'll send you to warm with Pluto!' 'Why don't you say hell?' asked the other. 'Bah!' replied Arouet; 'the one is no more a certainty than the other.'

Here spoke the religious influence of the priestly godfather, who, before he died, had tried to form the godson's mind by recounting to him some of Ninon de l'Enclos' most marvellous adventures.

In 1710, at the midsummer prize-giving, Arouet, runs the story, took so many prizes as to attract the notice of the famous J. B. Rousseau, the author of the 'Moïsade,' the first poet in France, and once shoemaker to the Arouet family. The great man congratulated and encouraged the boy who was to be so much greater. To be sure he was an ugly boy for all that keen look of his! Ugly boy and mediocre poet were to fight each other tooth and nail hereafter, with the ugly boy the winner for ever.

If young Arouet was anything like an older Voltaire, he knew how to play as well as how to work, and how to work gaily with a jest always ready to relieve the tedium.

The defeat of Blenheim had shadowed the year 1704 when he went to school. In 1711, when he left

it, three heirs to the throne died one after the other as if the judgment of God had already fallen upon their wicked house. Abroad, were Marlborough and defeat ; at home, death, hunger, and religious persecution. Arouet had a heart always sensitive to misfortune, but he was gay, seventeen, and fresh from drudgery.

When he came home from St. Louis-le-Grand in that August of 1711 it was with every intention on his father's part, and no kind of intention on his own, that he should become *avocat*.

Was it the passing success of that poetical petition to the king which had put the idea of literature as a profession into his head ? Was it Ninon's pension ? or the approval of poet Rousseau ? The love of letters had been in this boy always, a dominant taste, a ruling passion, which he could no more help than he could help the feebleness of his body or the astounding vigour of his mind.

He took the earliest opportunity of announcing to his father that he intended to devote himself to writing.

M. Arouet received the announcement exactly as it might have been expected he would. Literature ! Better be a lackey or a play-actor at once. Literature ! What did that mean ? The Bastille for a couplet, ruin, poverty, disgrace. Rousseau himself had just been degraded from the highest place to the lowest for verses he was only supposed to have written. 'Literature,' said Maître Arouet with the irate dogmatism which takes no denial, 'is the profession of the man who wishes to be useless to society, a burden to his relatives, and to die of hunger.' The relatives, fearing the burden, vociferously agreed with him.

Arouet père had most unluckily once taken wine

with the great Corneille and found that genius the most insufferable old bore, of the very lowest conversation. The indignant parent made the house of Arouet exceedingly unquiet with his fumings and growlings. Pressure was very strong and François Marie was eighteen. The youth who said that his motto was 'To the point' was soon engaged in the matchless intricacies of French law, as yet unsimplified by a master mind into the Code Napoleon.

What would be the natural result of a distasteful occupation, youth, wit, and gaiety in eighteenth-century Paris? Such a result supervened with young Arouet almost at once. Boy though he was, Châteauneuf had already introduced him into a brilliant, libertine society called 'The Epicureans of the Temple.' At its head was the usual abbé—one Chaulieu—'the dissolute Anacreon' who drew a revenue of thirty thousand francs from his benefices to pay for his excesses. Vile, witty, and blasphemous, he was not more so than the noble and titled company over which he presided. It had every vice but one—that of dulness. Most of its members were old men, and as literary critics of the evanescent literature of the hour, unrivalled. To them, it is said, virtue and faith were alike the prejudices of fools. The notary's son, who was nobody and had done nothing, had but two claims for admission to such a society: one was the mental emancipation he had received from his godfather, and the other the daring brilliancy all his own. The Temple suppers were soon incomplete without him. Young Arouet was already showing himself a versifier of astounding audacity. The company of dukes and nobles, of men vastly his superior in age and acquirements, did not daunt him in the least. A penniless boy, he had that careless ease with



great people—a certain charming air of familiarity—which never offended if it made old men smile at a boyish vanity, and which he never afterwards lost. Some of his *mots* at those suppers have come down to posterity, and were not less acceptable to the Temple because they are no longer transcribable. At an epicurean supper at the Prince of Conti's, young Arouet could turn to the company and exclaim, 'Here we are all princes or poets!'

One poet received very short shrift from respectable, sensible old M. Arouet *père*, when he came home in the small hours of the morning from these orgies. The determined old man locked the house and went to bed, and behold! François Marie must pay for his amusements by walking the streets till morning. That did not daunt him. Nothing daunted him. He was young and enjoying himself, with the keenest sense of the ludicrous, and perfectly willing to take his pleasures—at a cost. One day, finding himself shut out as usual, he went to sleep in the porter's chair in the Palais de Justice, and was carried, still asleep, the next morning, into a café hard by, by two legal wags, his friends. The recollection of Brother Armand's long, disapproving face at home only lent additional piquancy to Arouet's revels abroad. Another day, a noble lady with literary aspirations gives him a hundred louis for tactfully correcting her bad rhymes. Young Arouet, idly watching an auction, bids for a carriage and pair and has them knocked down to him. He drives about Paris all day with his friends, and at three o'clock in the morning takes the carriage home and tries to get the horses into his father's stables. The noise wakes up Maître Arouet, who turns his scapegrace out of doors there and then, and sells the horses and

carriage the very next day. One likes the peppery old father with his dogged determination. He would have won the battle over any other son but this one, and deserved to win. He sent the prodigal to Caen in disgrace, and Caen fell in love at once with a youth so clever and amusing, and turned the exile to a delight. There was a charming literary lady here also, who abandoned her *protégé*, however, when she found he could write indecorous verses too, and there was a Jesuit Father who prophesied a great future for this brilliant madcap. Then the busy old notary at home sent a message to his François Marie—if he would come back and settle to work he would buy him a good post; in time, get him made Counsel to the Parliament of Paris. ‘Tell my father,’ was the answer, ‘I do not want any place that can be bought. I will make one for myself that will cost nothing.’

Twenty-six years after, one Voltaire, in his ‘Life of Molière,’ wrote that all who had made a name in the *beaux-arts* had done so (in spite of) their relations. ‘Nature has always been much stronger with them than education;’ and again, ‘I saw early that one can neither resist one’s ruling taste, nor fight one’s destiny.’ It was so in this boy’s case at any rate. Some of the monetary prudence inherited from the old notary, and which was so greatly to distinguish a later Voltaire from most of his brothers of the pen, was in embryo within him now. Yet when he got back to Paris after those few months at Caen he was as gay, wild, and determined as ever, and M. Arouet, in despair, procured for him the post of page or *attaché* to the Marquis de Châteauneuf (brother of the abbé) and shipped him off with that ambassador to the Netherlands in the September of 1713.



The Marquis de Châteauneuf and suite reached the Hague on September 28, 1713, but did not formally enter the town until later. 'It is amusing,' one of the suite wrote, 'to make an entry into a city where you have already been living several weeks.'

Page, *attaché*, or diplomat, whichever people called him, *this* page, *attaché*, or diplomat was going to enjoy himself. Before they were well established at the Hague he must needs fall head over ears in love with a certain Olympe Dunoyer, the daughter of an adventurous mother who lived by her wits and an audacious society periodical called 'The Quintessence.' Olympe, or, more endearingly, Pimpette, was one-and-twenty. She knew something of the world already. With such a mother and the impecunious roving life they had led, that was inevitable. She was not pretty, her lover said long after. She was what is a great deal more dangerous—fascinating and impulsive. He gave her from the first a boy's honest ardent affection. He wrote her immensely long, vigorous, passionate epistles. He originated the most beautiful youthful scheme by which Protestant Pimpette (Madame Dunoyer and her daughter were Protestant) was to be brought back to the true Church, and to Paris, where her Catholic father and sister were living. For a couple of months, the worldly mother not suspecting its existence, the course of true love ran smoothly. But one fatal night Arouet coming home late after a blissful interview, encountered his chief. Madame Dunoyer will certainly disapprove of the addresses of a penniless boy of nineteen! Having a wholesome fear of that libellous 'Quintessence,' the ambassador felt bound to disapprove too. The *attaché* must go back to France to-morrow! The *attaché*, with his irresistible energy

and daring, got forty-eight hours' grace. His valet, Lefèvre, was his accomplice; a certain shoemaker was Pimpette's. A further unavoidable delay in the time of Arouet's departure came to the lovers' assistance. One moonlit night Arouet disguised himself, signalled beneath his mistress's window, and drove her away to Scheveningen, five miles off, where he made her write three letters which were designed to help his scheme of getting her to Paris. Sometimes they met at the obliging shoemaker's, daring, frightened, and happy, with the shoemaker's wife for a sentinel outside.

Of course the ambassador got wind of the interviews, and forbade his *attaché* to leave the embassy. But the irrepressible lover *would* see his mistress—'though it bring my head to the block.' He let himself down from a window by night, and met a trembling Pimpette who had escaped, heaven knows how! from the Argus-eyed mother—outside her home.

Then the ambassador offered this impossible *attaché* his choice—to leave Holland immediately—or in a week's time with a solemn vow not to leave his quarters meanwhile. Arouet chose the week and the vow. He sent Lefèvre with a letter to Pimpette. If I cannot come to you, you must come to me! 'Send Lisbette at three o'clock and I will give her a parcel for you containing a boy's dress.' The mad night came, and Pimpette, the most endearing boy in the world, with it. The whole escapade was wild enough. It says something for this impassioned Arouet of nineteen that at its worst it was nothing but an escapade. 'My love is founded on a perfect esteem,' he had written, and 'I love your honour as I love you.' He rallied her, not a little gaily, in prose and verse,

after that dear meeting. She was such a pretty boy! 'I fear you did not take out your sword in the street, which was all that was needed to make a perfect young man!' 'But while I am teasing you I learn that Lefèvre suspected you yesterday.' Of course he did. But Lefèvre would not betray his master to the ambassador, who had more than a suspicion of the interview. And the next night Arouet broke his parole, got out of the window, and met Pimpette outside her house once more. The ambassador heard of this too, wrote a furious letter to Maître Arouet describing the whole affair, and on December 18, 1713, the lover was despatched home.

He went on writing to Pimpette, of course. It was *her* fate that agitated him—not his. She must be sure to burn his letters—she must not expose herself to the fury of that termagant of a mother. She must take heart; she must be true to him! The letter from the boat which was carrying him to France was full of that capital, clever plan for bringing her over to the Jesuits—to be converted, as near to Arouet as possible, in Paris. All these love letters to Pimpette are much more loving than witty. They are so enthusiastic and earnest and young, so energetic and devoted, so unselfish and hopeful! They make one feel young to read them. It has been said that they are not the letters of Mirabeau. They are those of an *honest* man.

The very first thing Arouet did when he reached Paris on this Christmas Eve of 1713 was exactly what he had told Pimpette he would do. He went straight to his old master, Father Tournemine, at St. Louis-le-Grand, to whom he had already written some of the circumstances, to arrange with the Jesuits for bringing back the lost Protestant sheep to the Roman fold.



Arouet did not think it necessary to mention that the lost sheep was, in point of fact, a lamb—charming, and one-and-twenty—or that he had ever seen her. Good Tournemine promised to do his very best to get Pimpette's father to take her in. In fact the whole scheme was working beautifully when that irascible and dogged old Maître Arouet, who had received not only the ambassador's version of the affair but the furious Madame Dunoyer's, positively obtained a *lettre de cachet* for his scapegrace son, with which to get him arrested and imprisoned.

Young Arouet had not been home, which was very prudent of him. His presence would only have further exasperated his father. The *lettre de cachet* was not put into effect. The lover went on loving, adoring, and writing to his mistress. What was an angry father after all? A necessary rôle in the comedy. What was distance or opposition, what was anything or anybody to Arouet if Pimpette only loved him? Of the two, she was far the more cool and reasonable. She urged him to study law as his father bade him. And for her sake he did even that. A year or two later she became Countess of Winterfeld. Some years later still, he had the pleasure of seeing some of his own love letters to her figuring in a scandalous work of her mother's called 'Lettres Historiques et Galantes.' Even these events did not disturb a certain tender respect for her memory which he bore to the end of his life. When he was imprisoned in the Bastille four years later, he still carried about with him a little, undated, mis-spelt letter about one of those dear, stolen interviews—half maternal, half tender in tone—the only letter of Pimpette's which has come down to posterity.

January 1714, then, beheld Arouet at the bidding of Pimpette, and having made the most abject apologies to his father (François Marie was nothing if not thorough), installed as clerk to one Maître Alain, and living with that dull and worthy solicitor and his wife. He learnt something of law here, no doubt. Nay, he must have learnt a great deal to be hereafter that shrewd and capable man of affairs he proved himself. But it was a dull time and an unfortunate. Maître Arouet kept his prodigal very close in the matter of money; and his prodigal affixed his name to certain bills which gave him trouble hereafter. Pimpette's letters were getting fewer and fewer. Pimpette was false. Then, in the August of this 1714, young Arouet tried for a prize offered by the French Academy for a poem celebrating the King's generosity in giving a new choir to Notre Dame; and failed. The failure attacked La Motte, the judge—the unjust judge, Arouet thought him—with epigrams, and then wrote a satire, called 'Mud,' on La Motte's 'Fables.' Old Arouet was furious again, and young Arouet's only consolation in life was the friendship of one Theriot, also clerk to the Alains, an idle, goodnatured, amusing scapegrace, nobody's enemy but his own, and to be Arouet's friend, though not always a faithful friend, for sixty years.

Caumartin, an old Temple acquaintance, reappeared on young Arouet's horizon again presently. Caumartin had an uncle, a famous old magistrate, the Marquis de Saint-Ange, living at Saint-Ange, nine miles from Fontainebleau. When young Caumartin conveyed an invitation to old Arouet that his prodigal should go and stay with Saint-Ange and resume his studies there, the notary naturally supposed an acceptance would be the best thing for Arouet's legal prospects.



And not for his legal prospects only. The boy had that satire, couplets, and epigrams running through Paris. He did not yet know what message he had to deliver to the world ; did not know perhaps that he had any message. But he was fast learning the language in which it was to be spoken, and speak in that language he must, were the whole earth peopled by angry fathers and conscientious Alains.

So it was as well that the autumn of 1714 saw him away from Paris and established in the fine old château of the Saint-Anges.

The old magistrate, however, was not magistrate only, or chiefly ; he was also a man of the world, and courtier. So it soon came about that, instead of learning maxims of the law, the lean-faced, keen-witted visitor sat and listened, a most eager and intelligent audience, to gossip, scandal, *bons-mots* of the Court of a bygone day—anecdotes of Henry of Navarre and personal recollections of Louis XIV. The château had a splendid library. But it was hardly needed—‘Cau-martin carries the living history of his age in his head,’ said his courtly young guest in a quatrain.

It was while he was at Saint-Ange he dashed on to paper the beginning of what was afterwards the ‘Henriade’ ; and started that vast collection of anecdotes which formed the material for the ‘Century of Louis XIV.’

Arouet stayed several months in the château, occasionally paying a flying visit to the capital. The end of the Sun King’s reign was fast approaching. The famous Bull Unigenitus was the one great topic of all men’s conversation ; and no doubt was freely discussed at Saint-Ange. If the young visitor had come there meaning to be author, he left a hundred times

more fixed in that idea. In August 1715 Louis XIV. was dying. Arouet hastened to Paris to see the strange things that death would bring about.

In his pocket he had a play, 'Œdipe,' on which he had now been working for two years.

In his soul were the courage, the conscious power, the clear outlook to a future all unwarranted by the present, which are the consolations of genius.

Arouet was beginning the world.

## CHAPTER II

## EPIGRAMS AND THE BASTILLE

AT the death of Louis XIV. Paris was still the typical Paris of the old *régime*. Magnificence and squalor, dirt and splendour, a few men living like gods and most men living like beasts; narrow and filthy streets, and the sumptuous glory of the Court of the Sun King; a hungry *canaille*, and a *noblesse* whose exquisite finish of manner concealed the most profound corruption of morals the world has seen. Such was the Paris of 1715.

For the last few years of his life a woman and a priest had absolutely ruled the absolute King. 'France forgave Louis his mistresses,' said Arouet, 'but not his confessor.' The great Bull *Unigenitus*, that thunderbolt hurled at once against Jansenism and liberty, was the first rock on which the French monarchy struck. Everybody was to think as the King did! And France, who had starved patiently to pay for his conquests and his pleasures, received with open joy the news of the death of the man who had tried to strangle her soul with *Unigenitus*. Paris was flooded with satires as it had never been flooded even with panegyrics. The Court shook off the mantle of austerity which it had of late been wearing over its depravity. The flagrant vice of the Regency flaunted boldly in daylight, and men laughed openly at a religion in which for

years they had concurred devoutly—with the tongue in the cheek.

The world wagged thus when Arouet came up from Fontainebleau. The great majority of men go through life accepting what they find in it without question—supposing that because things are, they will be and ought to be. But this boy had the order of mind which takes nothing for granted. A state religion? Well, what had it done for that state and for the souls of men? A paternal government that left its children to starve? Arouet had from the first ‘lisped in numbers, for the numbers came;’ but when he saw on the one hand the crowded prisons and brutalised peasantry, and on the other the luxurious debauchery of the Regent’s Court, the numbers began for the first time to have a careless little note in them of a most piquant satire.

Louis died on September 1, 1715. Arouet was at his funeral—that funeral which was gayer than a fête. When a burlesque invitation to the obsequies of the Bull Unigenitus appeared, there were not wanting fingers to point at the notary’s son of one-and-twenty, who had come back to Paris more audacious than ever, and had immediately resumed his connection with his wild friends of the Temple.

He read aloud his ‘Œdipe’ to them presently. That, and his epigrams, quickly opened to him half the salons in Paris. Then Chaulieu—President of the Temple—introduced him to the magnificent Duchesse du Maine, ‘that living fragment of the Grand Epoch,’ and mistress of the famous ‘galères du bel esprit’ at Sceaux. Madame must have him, and at once, in her salon. To be sure the boy has nothing but his play in his pocket and is of no birth at all! But what a



wit and daring in his spirit ! What a matchless sarcasm in those piercing eyes ! The Duchess and her set worshipped cleverness and hated the Regent. It was the only religion they had. What could they do but fall in love with this 'little Arouet' who could hardly have been dull if he had tried ; and was much more than suspected of the authorship of a too-telling epigram on Philip of Orleans and his infamous daughter, du Berri ?

'Little Arouet' read aloud 'Œdipe' to the Duchess's court. He was at ease in this society as he was at ease in all societies. 'Men are born equal, and die equal.' 'It is only externals which distinguish them.' Those were the sentiments of one Arouet de Voltaire. He must have known, not the less, that here, there was no one who was *his* equal. But he sentimentalised gaily in the moonlit gardens of Sceaux—her 'white nights' the Duchess called them—and watched senile old Chaulieu making love to the Duchess's companion, Mademoiselle de Launay ; wrote wicked satirical poems to please his hostess ; and was so clever and daring that at last all the bold brilliant things that were whispered in Paris were fathered on the presumptuous youth, the son of Saint-Simon's notary.

In the spring of 1716 he stayed with Saint-Ange again. In May he was back in the capital. He did say, no doubt, when the Regent put down half the horses in the royal stables, that he would have done better to have dismissed half the asses who had surrounded the late King. Then a shameful epigram on the shameful du Berri came to the ears of the persons chiefly concerned. Young Arouet was exiled to Tulle—Tulle being changed pretty easily, at his father's request, to Sully. No reason was assigned by the government for this order of exile.



The Duke of Sully readily became a most hospitable host. The Duchess had a most charming poor companion, Mademoiselle de Livri. It was but an exile *pour rire*, after all—a warning fatherly rap from that paternal government on the knuckles of an impertinent child.

It is strange to see how the boy chafed under that agreeable courtly life of hunting and conversation. 'It would be delightful to stay at Sully,' he wrote, 'if I were only allowed to go away from it.' The Duke was the most delightful of hosts, and his estate most charmingly situated. The young people of the château, in pairs, sonneted the midsummer moon in the gardens; and wrote each other dainty little quatrains and flatteries. Arouet loved verses and the society of charming and vivacious young women in general, and, here, of one charming and vivacious young woman in particular; and he was two-and-twenty. But he wrote himself back to Paris by poetic compliments to the Regent so finely turned that the author must have had some unusual spur on his imagination. He was, in fact, beginning to wonder if there was not a work waiting for him in the world.

If it was not his fault, it was the fault of the reputation he had made, that when there appeared in Paris, immediately he returned to it in the spring of 1717, two stinging satires on the state of France and the Regent's manner of life called respectively 'J'ai Vu' and 'Puero Regnante,' they should at once be assigned to him.

'Puero Regnante' is a dog-Latin inscription.

A boy reigning ;  
A poisoner  
Administering ;  
Councils ignorant and unstable ;

Religion more unstable ;  
An exhausted treasury ;  
Public faith violated ;  
Injustice triumphant ;  
Sedition imminent ;  
The country sacrificed  
To the hope of a Crown ;  
The inheritance anticipated ;  
France perishing.

The ' J'ai Vu ' is a short poem.

I have seen . . . the prisons full ;  
I have seen . . . the people groaning ;  
I have seen . . . Port Royal demolished—

' I have seen,' in short, everything to which a prudent person with a proper regard to his safety would have been conveniently blind.

Arouet had not written them. But that did not matter. He might have written them. They were after his manner. Besides, had he not been in exile and disgrace, and was he not still so wicked that his good old father would not have him to the house, and he was living an outcast in furnished lodgings ? These reasonings would have been conclusive alone. Then he was known to be the moving spirit at Sceaux, and Sceaux was but another name for disaffection.

A spy, Beauregard, swore to a conversation he had had with Arouet, in which Arouet, with a most unnatural imprudence, avowed himself the author of both satires with much circumstantial detail ; and added ' things not mentionable ' about the Duchesse du Berri.

He went his way quite gaily for a while, however. His ' Œdipe ' had been accepted, and was actually in rehearsal at the theatre. Here was a triumph indeed. He was still beloved of all the salons and the women—dear, delightful, dangerous. He had the keenest

sense of humour to help him through these little *contretemps* of existence. He would, now at least, hardly have missed his *mot* to save his skin—and he held that dear, as the physically weak are apt to do. He was sauntering one day, on May 15, 1717, through the Palais Royal Gardens, runs the story, when he was called into the presence of the Regent, also sauntering there.

‘I bet you, M. Arouet,’ says Philip, ‘I will show you something you have never seen before.’

‘What is that, Monseigneur?’

‘The inside of the Bastille.’

‘I take it as seen,’ replies Arouet airily.

He could, all things considered, have been very little surprised when on May 16, Whitsunday, while he was still sleeping calmly in bed, he was served with a *lettre de cachet*, his room and person ignominiously searched, and himself removed the next day to that historic prison. Perhaps he smiled a little, but not bitterly, when they discovered on him Pimpette’s poor little note. ‘I am not made for the passions,’ he said a year or two later. He was not. A great work and a great passion seldom run together. The work must be the only passion one has.

The prison was not very painful, it appears. Arouet was allowed an excellent room, books, a fire, good wine, first-rate coffee, the use of the bowling-green and the billiard-room, visitors, to a reasonable extent, and often a seat at the governor’s dinner table. Some of the King’s guests might be rotting forgotten for unknown crimes in the dungeons beneath; but, although almost all the literary men of the period were bastilled some time or other in their lives, they unite in praising the prison as very reasonably comfortable.



The present prisoner was nothing if not a philosopher. Since I am here, I may as well be as easy as I can ! The captives were allowed to make purchases. Arouet entered the Bastille, Monday, May 17, 1717. On the following Thursday he signed a receipt for a couple of volumes of Homer, two Indian handkerchiefs, a little cap, two cravats, a nightcap, and a bottle of essence of cloves. He had everything he wanted, in fact, save two things. For the first few weeks of his imprisonment it seems almost certain that he was not allowed pen and ink.

But if he could not write, he could and did compose. There was that poem. Should it be called the 'League,' the 'Henriade,' or 'Henry of Navarre,' or what? What's in a name after all? He had a memory so marvellous and so exact that he could not only invent, without committing to paper, whole cantos of that infant epic, but remember them. The subject possessed him. He said he dreamt in his sleep, in the Bastille, the second canto on the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew exactly as it stands to-day. It is not unlikely. Now and ever when he was writing, *what* he was writing was to him food, air, warmth, light, life. 'His prison became his Parnassus,' said Frederick the Great in his funeral oration on Voltaire. Hundreds of projects besides that epic, to be called the 'Henriade' finally, coursed through that brain, which was surely the most active ever given to man. From his captivity he could look out on his world. What was there not to do there? He must have asked himself a thousand times what part his was to be on the great stage of human existence.

'I knew how to reap benefit from my misfortune,' he wrote afterwards. 'I learnt how to harden myself against sorrow, and found within me a strength not to



be expected from the lightness and follies of my youth.'

And at Court, honest memoir-writing Saint-Simon was apologising for mentioning to his readers so insignificant a fact as that one Arouet, 'the son of my father's notary,' was imprisoned for some audacious verses; while at home that good old notary announced vindictively, 'I told you so! I knew his idleness would lead to disgrace. Why did he not go into a profession?'

Something else Arouet did in the Bastille besides dreaming epics. He changed his name. It is now generally thought that he called himself by that one with which he has gone among the gods, after a family who were his mother's ancestors. Before the existence of this family was discovered some supposed that Voltaire was an anagram on the paternal Arouet—Arouet, L. J. (*le jeune*). Others believed that, remembering not untenderly from a prison those who had called him 'le petit volontaire' in his childhood's home, he corrupted and abbreviated it into the Voltaire he was to make immortal. As to the reason for the change—'I was very unlucky under my first name,' he wrote; 'I want to see if this one will succeed any better.' Beyond the wildest dream that ever Hope dreamt, 'this one' was to succeed indeed.

The real author, a certain Le Brun, confessed to that terrible 'J'ai Vu' presently, and the irrepressible supposed author, who was imprisoned for it, sat down in his prison and wrote a burlesque and very profane poem on his arrest, which had taken place, it will be remembered, on Whitsunday.

As he now had only that dog-Latin epigram, the 'Puero Regnante' hanging over him, Voltaire was released from the Bastille on April 11, 1718, and exiled

merely to his father's house at Châtenay. The authorities do not seem to have thought it necessary to apologise for their little mistake—a mistake which kept a brilliant boy of three-and-twenty shut up in a prison for eleven months for somebody else's rhymes. The little justice there was in France in those days miscarried so frequently that miscarriage was more the rule than the exception. The ex-prisoner wrote from Châtenay letters to the authorities begging to be allowed to return to Paris, and denying that 'abominable inscription, the "Puero,"' pretty vigorously. Only allow me to return to Paris, if but for a couple of hours, and throw myself at the feet of the Regent and explain all! I have proof now of the double-dealings of the spies who betrayed me! 'A little journey, situated as I am, would be like the drop of water to the wicked rich man in the parable!' He was permitted to make that little journey, and to see Regent Philip.

'Be prudent,' said Orleans, 'and I will provide for you.'

'I shall be delighted if your Highness will give me my board,' replied the audacious young wit, 'but beg that you will take no further trouble about my lodging.'

Some authorities place this story at a later date and under different circumstances. If the present be its true place and time, the *mot* did not greatly help Arouet to regain his freedom, though a *mot* had done something to lose it. He was allowed to pay flying visits to the capital, but it was not until October 12, 1718, that he was given official permission to return to Paris and to stay there as long as he liked.

Either now, or before the Bastille adventure, he must needs fall in love with that pretty Mademoiselle de Livri, the Duchess of Sully's companion and

relative, who would fain be an actress, with a Voltaire to teach her elocution and tenderness. The pair rode about Paris together in a bad hackney coach, and had bad suppers together—in Elysium. A friend of Voltaire's, de Génonville, fell in love with Mademoiselle presently, and she with him—to Voltaire's passing displeasure. He vented his feeling in a few graceful verses—and it vanished into air. The whole thing was but an episode after all, a *penchant* more than a passion, the light fancy of the senses that touched the deeper soul not at all. But posterity should be grateful to Mademoiselle. Voltaire had his portrait painted for her by Largillière, and may be seen to-day as he looked then—flowing wig, wide mouth, the ruffled hand thrust lightly in the waistcoat; a lover, young, satisfied with his mistress, himself, and all the world; and in the eyes and forehead, latent but present, power and will extraordinary. The mockery, the humour, and the cynicism which make later portraits of Voltaire like no other man's, are not in this one. His relations with women—niece or mistress—always show him in some respects in his best light: patient, forbearing, and faithful; generous to the memory of a false woman, giving honour where honour was due, respecting intelligence, and never weary of trying to turn a fool into a sensible companion.

But he had now other things to think of besides the sentiments. He had made his *début*, as has been well said, in epigrams. If he had not written 'J'ai Vu,' he *could* have written it a thousand times more damning and deadly. The most beautiful sting that ever wasp concealed beneath a gay coat, he was keeping for his enemies yet. He was still the despair of M. Arouet and the spoilt child of salons. He had a reputation

but the more widespread for being evil. He was rather vain and inimitably amusing. He was so clever—he might surely do anything! He was, in fact, that most unsatisfactory creature in the world—a youth of promise.

The performance was to come.



## CHAPTER III

## 'ŒDIPE,' AND THE JOURNEY TO HOLLAND

ON November 18, 1718, there was produced in Paris the tragedy of 'Œdipe,' by M. Arouet de Voltaire.

The subject of the play is classical and the plot entirely impossible. Love interest there is none. The style is not a little bombastical and longwinded. The characters are always talking about what they are going to do, instead of doing it. The good people are very, very good, and the bad ones very, very bad. At the best they are brilliant automatons—masks, not faces.

The play has indeed the perfect smoothness and elegance dear to the French soul. All the unities are nicely observed, and there is never an anachronism. But to make it the astounding success it was, it must have had in it something better even than the brilliant ingenuity of a Voltaire—something better even than a Voltaire's perfect knowledge of the human nature for which he was writing. It contained the first trumpet call of the Voltairian message.

The house was crowded. It was the custom of the day for the playwright to beat up his friends and engage them to applaud the first steps of the child of his brain. But here also were enemies and neutrals—all Paris agog to see the next move in the game of a daring player. Among the audience, half grumbling, half delighted, was old Maitre Arouet. 'The rascal!

the rascal !' he muttered, as some bold touch brought down the house. Brother Armand should have been there too, to have heard the strangely passionate enthusiasm with which was received the couplet which, after all, merely referred to the pagan priesthood of a long dead age :

Our priests are not what a foolish people think them !  
Our credulity makes all their knowledge.

But ' when fanaticism has once gangrened a brain, the malady is incurable,' said Voltaire ; and neither he nor any other could alter an Armand. A certain Maréchale de Villars—*galante*, coquette, with all the easy *ton* learnt in Courts, and all the French woman's *aplomb* and grace to make five-and-thirty more dangerous than five-and-twenty—leant curiously out of her box presently to watch a young buffoon of an actor who was doing his best to ruin M. de Voltaire's play. The high priest, in a scene essentially grave and tragic, had as trainbearer a lean-faced, narrow-shouldered, boyish-looking youth who must needs take *his* part as comic, and make a fool not of himself only but of his high priest also. Who is the ridiculous boy ? M. de Voltaire. It appears deliciously piquant to the Maréchale that an author should run the risk of damning his own work for a jest. What a refreshing person to have to stay when one is a little bored ! Madame receives him in her box—he knows quite well how to behave and how to be as affable, daring, and amusing as could be wished—and they begin a friendship, not without result.

There were some allusions to the Regent and Madame du Berri in ' *Œdipe*,' very vociferously applauded, which must have made Maître Arouet groan in spirit

and think that after all his Armand, his rigid 'fool in prose' at home, was safer to deal with than this 'fool in verse' on the boards, who would *not* be warned and *must* come to the gallows. But the Regent, like a wise man, hearing of that astounding first night and the allusions, presented the author with a gold medal and a thousand crowns; talked with him publicly at the next Opera ball, and made a point of coming to the performance to show that the arrows could not have been really intended for him after all.

As for the Duchesse du Berri, *she* came five nights in succession to the piece. And of course all the little, witty, disaffected Court of Maine were there too, enjoying those allusions and looking hard at their enemies, the Regent and his daughter.

The curtain went down on perhaps the most successful *début* that ever playwright had made. 'Œdipe' ran for forty-five nights. Clever Philip commanded it to Court to be performed before the little Louis XV. The enterprising and energetic young author asked, and obtained, permission to dedicate it, in book form, to downright old Charlotte Elizabeth, the Regent's mother. He sent a copy, with a flaming sonnet, to George I. of England; and yet another copy to the Regent's sister, the Duchess of Lorraine, with a letter wherein is to be found his first signature of his new name, *Arouet de Voltaire*. When the Prince de Conti, his old Temple companion, complimented 'Œdipe' and its author in a poem of his own, 'Sir,' said Voltaire airily, 'you will be a great poet; I must get the King to give you a pension.'

The young playwright gained from 'Œdipe'—not including the Regent's present—about four thousand francs, besides a fine capital of fame. He was the old notary's son to some purpose after all, and began



to invest money. As to the fame, he took *that* very modestly. When the women declared his 'Œdipe' to be a thousand times better than his old hero Corneille's play on the same subject, the young man made the happiest quotation from Corneille himself, disclaiming superiority.

He attended every one of the forty-five performances—a learner of his own art and of the actors'.

He must have gone back gay and well pleased enough on those evenings to his furnished room in the Rue de Calandre.

In the spring of 1719 the faithless and charming Mademoiselle de Livri insisted on his using his influence to get her a good part in his play. Perhaps she, Voltaire, and 'little de Génonville' enjoyed themselves about Paris together as before. 'Que nous nous aimions tous trois ! . . . que nous étions heureux !' the forsaken lover wrote ten years later in his graceful poem to the memory of de Génonville.

Mademoiselle was no actress, though she wished to be one. Her very accent was provincial. She was laughed off the stage when 'Œdipe' was revived after Lent, and Voltaire very nearly came to blows with one of the laughers, Poisson, who was one of the actors too. He had Poisson thrown into prison, and then himself obtained his release. Poisson and the public were right after all, and Voltaire soon knew it.

Mademoiselle retired from the boards, and married.

When, a few years later, Voltaire went to call on her in her fine house when she was the Marquise de Gouvernet, and her huge Swiss porter, not knowing him, refused him admission, he sent her 'Les Vous et Les Tu,' one of the most charmingly graceful and bantering of all his poems. In his old age at Ferney, when the



first rose of the year appeared he would pluck it and kiss it to the memory of Mademoiselle de Livri. Perhaps it was of her he thought when he wrote one of the few tender lines to be found in his works, and one of the tenderest in any poetry :

*C'est moi qui te dois tout, puisque c'est moi qui t'aime.*

On his last great visit to Paris, when he was nearly eighty-four and she not much younger, the two met for the last time—ghosts out of shadowland—in a strange new world.

In this same spring of 1719 there appeared in Paris another satire on the Regent, called the 'Philippics.' M. de Voltaire had not written it, to be sure. But it was clever, and sounded as if he had. Besides, he was known to be the friend of the Duchesse du Maine, at the present moment shut up, with her Court, in the Bastille; of the gorgeous Duke of Richelieu and of the Spanish ambassador who were accomplices in a conspiracy against Orleans. So in May the authorities requested M. de Voltaire to spend the summer in the country; and he spent it at Villars.

If the Maréchale had been charming in Paris, she was a thousand times more so here. If she had flattered a brilliant young author in her box at the theatre, she flattered and petted him a thousand times better now she had him to herself, an interesting young exile. Such a clever boy! so witty! so cynical! so amusing! He certainly ought to have been clever enough to guess that this woman of the world was only playing with him. But he was vain too—and did not guess it. 'Friendship is a thousand times better worth having than love,' he wrote disconsolately in a letter after a while. 'There is something in me which makes it

ridiculous for me to love. . . . It is all over. I renounce it for life.' The renunciation was not so easy as he expected. He was, at least for a time, out of gear, restless, discontented. The husband, Louis XIV.'s famous marshal, had a thousand anecdotes of the Sun King to relate. And the future author of the 'Century of Louis XIV.' was almost too *distracted* to listen to them. He forgot Paris and his career. He forgot the dazzling success of 'Œdipe.' He would not indeed have been Voltaire, but some lesser man, if he had let this or any other passion ride over him roughshod. He had the 'Henriade' and a new play with him. He turned to his work—worked like a fury—until he had worked the folly out of him. But, not the less, 'he never spoke of it afterwards but with a feeling of regret, almost of remorse.'

By June 25, 1719, he was at Sully, where he wrote most of his new play, 'Artémire,' and spent the autumn and part of the winter. Paris had gone mad over the financial schemes of John Law, and it was well that a young man of five-and-twenty, with a taste for speculation, and money in his pocket for the first time, should be out of the way of temptation. From Sully he went back to Villars, and from Villars to the Duke of Richelieu's. 'I go from château to château,' he wrote. He liked the life well, no doubt. It was gay, easy, witty. For anyone else it would have been idle too; but not for a Voltaire.

He had already complained that his passion for his Maréchale de Villars had lost him a good deal of his time. But, all the same, by February 1720 'Artémire' was finished, and its author was back in Paris superintending its rehearsals.

Its first appearance took place on February 13, 1720.

It is not too much to say that it was a most dismal failure.

Adrienne Lecouvreur, the great tragic actress, had hoped everything from it. At a private reading a certain Abbé de Bussi had shed so many tears at its pathos that he had caught cold from them. The public was not so softhearted. It was in no mood for plays. Law had just ruined half Paris. When the crash came—'Paper,' said Voltaire, with his usual neat incisiveness, 'is now reduced to its intrinsic value.' Someone says that this *mot* was the funeral oration of Law's system. Law's system was the funeral oration of 'Artémire.' It was a dull feeble play. Not all its author's rewritings and correctings and embellishments—and it was his custom to rewrite, correct, and embellish all his works until labour and genius could do no more for them—could ever make it good enough for him to publish it as a whole. But when the public took it exactly at his own valuation, he was not a little hurt. It was a later Voltaire who said that he envied the beasts because of their ignorance of evil to come and of *what people said of them*. He was not less sensitive now than then. The last performance of the rewritten 'Artémire' took place on March 8, 1720. When, soon after, the 'Henriade' was criticised at a private reading, he threw it disgustedly into the fire; and President Hénault saved it at the price of a pair of lace ruffles. Perhaps the fire was not very bright, or the author had a very shrewd idea that one of his friends would not let a masterpiece be lost to posterity.

He went to stay again with Richelieu after his 'Artémire' disappointment; and from there wrote to Theriot telling him to copy out, in his very best hand-



writing, cantos of the 'Henriade' which were to be propitiatingly presented to the Regent. From Richelieu Voltaire went to Sully, and from Sully to La Source, the home of the great St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, and his French wife.

In the June of 1721 he went back to Villars again. He could trust himself to see his Maréchale now. They had 'white nights' here as at Sceaux and at Sully. They gaily astronomised through opera glasses in the long, warm, starlit summer nights in the garden—with the assistance of that fashionable 'Plurality of Worlds' by M. de Fontenelle. 'We mistake Venus for Mercury,' Voltaire wrote to him gaily in verse, 'And break up the order of the Heavens.'

From that modish courtly life the man who had been François Marie Arouet was summoned home in the December of 1721 to the deathbed of his old father. A strange group gathered round it—Catherine, Madame Mignot, a middle-aged married woman; Armand, the austere and surly Jansenist of eight-and-thirty; and the most brilliant man in France. Good old Maître Arouet went the way of all flesh, trusting greatly neither in his 'fool in prose' nor his 'fool in verse,' but leaving Prose a post in the Chamber of Accounts which brought in thirteen thousand francs yearly, and Verse a sum which afforded him four thousand odd francs per annum. He had appointed a trustee and guardian, with whom Verse, who was always what his valets hereafter charitably called 'vif,' immediately quarrelled.

The guardian was indeed such a dilatory old person that it took him four years to divide the estate among Maître Arouet's children; and two years after his father's death Voltaire was writing lugubriously to



Theriot, 'I shall be obliged to work to live, after having lived to work.'

Things were not quite so bad as that, however. When he left the Bastille the Regent had given him a pension of twelve hundred francs. And now, a few days after his father's death, in January 1722, the boy King, Louis XV., made him a further pension of two thousand francs. From this moment Voltaire never spent his whole income.

In no other concern of his life has he been so much misrepresented as in his dealings with money matters.

It is hard to see why for all other men independence should be considered honourable and a freedom of the spirit, and grinding poverty an inspiration and liberty only to the man of letters. But the peculiarly foolish idea that genius cannot be genius if it understands its bank book, and that great truths can only come from a garret and an ill-fed brain, is not yet extinct. Many of Voltaire's biographers feel that they have to apologise for him paying his bills regularly, hunting out his creditors, and investing his money with shrewdness and caution. It would have been so much more romantic to have flung it about royally—and then borrowed someone else's!

But Voltaire knew that 'poverty enervates the courage.' He never uttered a truer word. If it was his mission to whip the world's apathy into action with unpalatable truths, he could not depend on that world for the bread he put into his mouth and the coat he put on his back. 'Ask nothing of anyone; need no one.' 'My vocation is to say what I think, *fari quæ sentiam*.' If Voltaire had been insolvent the Voltairian message could never have been uttered.

In this May of 1722 he further sought to improve

his monetary position by running to earth, for Cardinal Dubois—the first, greatest, and vilest of the Regent's Prime Ministers—a spy, one Salamon Levi. Voltaire does not appear to have thought the occupation a derogatory one. Nor did it hurt his cynic and elastic conscience to flatter 'Iscariot' Dubois to the top of his bent both in verse and prose, and declare that he (Voltaire) would be eternally grateful if Dubois would employ him somehow, in something.

The pension from the King—very irregularly paid at first, and soon not paid at all—was not taken by him as the authorities must have hoped it would be, and neither shut his mouth nor quenched his spirit. It was nominally a tribute to a talented young playwright. He took it virtually as such. His old talent for getting into mischief was as lively as ever; and spies at this period seem to have had an unlucky fascination for him. One night in July 1722 at the house of the Minister of War he met Beauregard, the spy who had been the instrument of putting him into the Bastille. 'I knew spies were paid,' he said, 'but I did not know that it was by eating at the minister's table.' Beauregard bided his time, and fell on the poet one night on the Bridge of Sèvres as he was crossing it in his sedan chair, beating him severely. To give blows with a cane was hereafter translated '*Voltairiser*' in the mouth of Voltaire's enemies. He had many of them. He had made so many *mots*! They denied him his proper share of physical courage. D'Argenson, his friend, though he said he had in his soul a strength worthy of Turenne, of Moses, and of Gustavus Adolphus, yet added that he feared the least dangers for his body and was 'a proven coward.' He was certainly, now and ever, a most nervously organised creature. When

he was at fever heat he could be plucky enough. But there is as little doubt that he dearly loved his safety as that he spent his whole life in endangering it.

He pursued Beauregard with a most nimble, passionate, vivid intensity. He must have had an extraordinary persistence to get that unwieldy mass of muddle and jobbery which called itself French law to administer any kind of justice; but he did it. It took him more than fifteen months to compass his revenge, and cost him immense sums of money as well as immense labour. The game was not worth the candle. But Voltaire was never the person to think of that. To him the game was everything while he pursued it. It was to this characteristic he owed some of his success in life.

The affair of the Bridge of Sèvres was, not the less, one of the most unfortunate incidents of his experience. To the day of his death it was a whip in the hands of his enemies which they used without mercy and without ceasing.

He must have been tired of fighting and failure, and in need of quiet and change when one of his philosophic marquises—a certain Madame de Rupelmonde—‘young, rich, agreeable,’ took him with her in July 1722, as her guest, a trip to Holland. Her witty companion of eight-and-twenty was in no sense her lover. The few *convenances* there were left in those days quite permitted such an association. The two had for each other merely a gallant friendship. Madame was a widow, of easy virtue, and fashionable enough to have religious doubts—to wish to be taught to think. As they jolted leisurely in her post-chaise over the rough roads of old France they had plenty of time to discuss



fate, free will, life, death, and the theologies. Voltaire found time, too, during the trip, to answer Madame's questions by an 'Epistle to Uranie'—in which he gave, in a few graceful pages, and with the admirable terseness and lucidity which were to be the hall-mark of all his writings, the most powerful objections to Christianity. It was his first open avowal of Deism. How long he had cherished that belief and outgrown all others, cannot be told. The whole temper of his mind was rationalistic. Christianity had come to him through the muddy channel of French Roman Catholicism in the eighteenth century. He began by disbelieving the shameless superstitions with which the Churchmen darkened and debased the understanding of the people. He ended by disbelieving everything which his reason could not follow. The process is easy and not uncommon.

The philosophic pair were much *fêted en route*. 'Œdipe' was performed when they were at Cambrai, as a delicate compliment. There was a Congress going on there too; and Voltaire wrote gaily therefrom to Cardinal Dubois (who was archbishop of the place but had never even seen it) one of those audacious, easy letters which were his *forte*, and which Dubois and Theriot between them passed round the salons of Paris. Voltaire and Madame were at Cambrai for some five or six weeks, and then went on to Brussels. Here lived now J. B. Rousseau, fifty-two years old, who from wit and licence had passed to dullness and orthodoxy. Of course the poets met. Voltaire had not seen Rousseau since he was a schoolboy, and Rousseau had been shown him as a prodigy for imitation. To the gay, unsparing logic of the younger poet the old one did not appear at all in the light of a





J. B. ROUSSEAU.

*From an Engraving after a Picture by J. Aved.*



prodigy now. 'He despises me because I neglect rhyme, and I despise him because he can do nothing but rhyme,' said Voltaire carelessly.

At first, however, all went well. Voltaire read his 'master,' as he called him, a part of the 'Henriade.' Rousseau praised it, only criticising such passages as would be likely to give offence to the Church. Then came a meeting, when the poets read to each other some of their minor poems; and Madame de Rumpelmonde was a gracious and sympathetic listener. Rousseau read his satire, the 'Judgment of Pluto;' which was nothing but an account of the wrongs which had exiled him. And Voltaire said the 'Judgment' was unworthy of the Great and Good Rousseau. Then Rousseau must needs read out his 'Ode to Posterity,' on the same subject. 'That is a letter, master,' says Voltaire, 'which will never reach its address.' Then Voltaire takes his 'Epistle to Uranie' and reads *that*. 'Stop, stop!' cries old Rousseau, still smarting under the audacious boy's criticisms. 'What horrible profanity!' And Voltaire asks since when the author of the 'Moïsade' has become devout.

There was the making of a very pretty quarrel here. The one sun was rising, the other setting. Both men were not a little vain, sensitive, and jealous. Henceforth, it was war to the knife. They parted; and if Voltaire forgave at the last, Rousseau never did.

Rousseau recorded afterwards how Voltaire attended mass on the first day of his arrival at Brussels and shocked the congregation by his profanity. The story was true, though it was written by an enemy. Voltaire was born irreverent. When he left Brussels he did not even revere that hero of his youth, Rousseau.

By October 1722 he and Madame had gone on to the Hague and Amsterdam.

The young man was always out dining and playing tennis there, reading aloud his works, keen, active, enjoying himself. His health, of which he was exceedingly fond of talking and complaining, was better than it had ever been; but that did not prevent him from drinking up one day as a kind of medical experiment—'from greediness,' said Madame de Rupelmonde—a bottle of medicine from her bedside which she was going to have taken, from necessity.

Perhaps in the midst of gaiety and enjoyment Voltaire recalled the last time he was here, Pimpette, and that wild episode of his youth. But this was the man who was always agog for the future; never a dreamer of the past—a doer, an actor, the most energetic spirit in history.

When he was at the Hague he was busy arranging for the publication of his 'Henriade' there, in that freer country, and continually reading and reciting extracts from it to his friends. After a few weeks' visit he started on his journey home. Madame de Rupelmonde had a house at the Hague, and as there was no other agreeable marquise with a travelling carriage returning to France just then, M. de Voltaire did the journey on horseback alone, and as economically as he could.

He was at Cambrai again on October 31, 1722, announcing the forthcoming publication of his epic. At the beginning of the new year, 1723, he was once more staying at La Source, near Orleans, with that exiled Lord Bolingbroke who had, said his guest, 'all the learning of his own country and all the politeness of ours.' The guest read aloud that dear epic. He



called it 'The League or Henry IV.' now, or 'The League,' or 'Henry IV.' only. He advertised it industriously at every château he stayed at. In Paris Theriot was trying to get subscriptions for it, and to propitiate the censor. From La Source Voltaire went to stay with other friends at Ussé, who were also friends of a charming early friend of his own, Madame de Mimeure.

By February 23, 1723, he was back again in Paris seeing a new play by Alexis Piron, called 'Harlequin Deucalion,' wherein the failure of 'Artémire' was piquantly satirised. 'Deucalion' is remarkable as having obeyed a prohibition of the censor, designed to stop comic opera in Paris, that not more than one person should appear on the stage at a time, and as having succeeded in spite of that obedience.

Then the active Voltaire was off to Rouen, where lived his old friend Cideville. Then he went on to Rivière Bourdet, near Rouen, the country home of the Bernières, a married couple, also very much his friends. All the time he was planning, scheming, working, for the production of his 'Henriade.' Almost all his letters of the year 1723 are to Theriot or Madame de Bernières, and almost all on this topic. In May he was staying at the Bernières' town house, on what is now the Quai Voltaire and was then the Quai des Théatins, opposite the gardens of the Tuileries. The 'Henriade' was finished at last. The subscription lists had not gone well; their ill-success had been burlesqued in the play which succeeded 'Deucalion.' That was mortifying. Still, it was but the chagrin of a moment. The 'Henriade' was about to appear. It must and should succeed! Had not its wary author read parts to the Regent, and changed phrases which might have

offended Dubois? The only thing he would not do was to alter its principles to suit the blindest and most autocratic powers that ever brought a country to ruin.

It must take its chance! It took it, and was prohibited by the censor immediately.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE 'HENRIADE,' AND A VISIT TO COURT

CONSIDERED as a poem, the 'Henriade' is the kind of fighting epic which is the delight of schoolboys and a little apt to bore their elders.

The subject is the life of Henry of Navarre; the chief event, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. Truth, Discord, and other abstract virtues are embodied, and talk at some length. The poem is modelled on, if not imitated from, Horace and Virgil. Regarded on the surface it is nothing but a dramatic story, easy, swinging, smooth, and with the lilt and rhythm such a story requires.

But beneath that surface, not seen but felt, beneath the easy couplets and running rhymes, there beats a spirit alert for liberty—the wings of the wild bird against the cage which keeps it from life, sunshine, and freedom. The pivot on which the poem turns is that supreme intolerance, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. Its atmosphere throughout is that of hatred of priestly power, fanaticism, superstition; the love of peace, justice, enlightenment. Its religion is Deism. And its dedication to Louis XV. contains these astounding words: 'You are king only because Henry IV. was a great man; and France, while wishing you as much virtue, and more happiness than he had, flatters herself that the life and the throne you owe to him will

bind you to follow his example ;' and 'The astonishment we feel when kings sincerely love the happiness of their people is a thing very shameful to them.' Voltaire himself said afterwards that he had advocated in it peace and tolerance in religion and told Rome many home truths. No wonder the censor damned it.

If anything had been needed—but nothing was needed—to make Voltaire more alert, eager, and determined to give his epic to the world, it would have been that ministerial prohibition. Its publication in Holland was conditional on its publication in Paris. Voltaire, as has been well said, had not written an epic to keep it in a portfolio. He lost no time. With the help of the Bernières and ever ready and goodnatured Theriot, he surreptitiously printed two thousand copies at Rouen. That occupation took at least five months—from the June of 1723 until the October. He was himself mostly in Paris, staying with the Bernières on the Quai des Théatins, where the noise nearly drove him distracted ; or in a very poor lodging of his own. Garret or château, what did it matter ? The 'Henriade' was everything—his world.

In September he was back at Rivière Bourdet. Everyone concerned in the scheme was infinitely active and secret. 'Little de Génonville' died in this September of a very bad kind of smallpox then epidemic in Paris. Voltaire mourned him much and long. He had a new tragedy in hand to keep his mind from the tragedies and trials of life, and turned to 'Mariamne' for the comfort and change of thought he needed. It was finished early in November, and the author put it in his pocket and went to stay with his friend M. de Maisons, at the Château of Maisons, in the forest of St. Germain, nine miles from Paris, where were fêtes,



parties, gaieties, and where Adrienne Lecouvreur was coming to read 'Mariamne' to the guests.

Maisons was but four-and-twenty, delicate, noble, accomplished; destined, it seemed, for all great things, but to die too soon. Madame, his wife, was the friend of that old love of Voltaire's, Madame de Villars.

By November 4, at least two of the guests, Voltaire and Adrienne Lecouvreur, had arrived. Two days later Voltaire developed smallpox.

No one can gain an adequate idea of his character without realising in what 'a thin and wretched case' Nature had enveloped 'what is called my soul.' No other great man, perhaps, ever fought such a plucky fight against physical weakness, weariness, and infirmities. Voltaire was not always ill, but he was never well. One of his valets said that his state of indisposition was natural and permanent and accompanied him from the cradle to the grave. He himself said he had never passed a single day without suffering, and could not even imagine what it must be like to be in robust health. But he had what he called his 'infallible secret'—work. Others have used physical weakness as an excuse for mental idleness, and indisposition as a natural holiday from labour. But not Voltaire. He dictated when he was too ill to write; and when he was too ill to think, he read dull books for information which he might find useful and make amusing; and when he was yet worse, and could do nothing else, he read and wrote that gay mockery of his leisure, his 'Pucelle.' The body was but the ragged covering of the soul at its best; at its worst, it was a subtle and seducing enemy, and one must be ever up and at it, with a thrust here and a lunge there, lest by any means it get the mastery. Voltaire fought it his whole life long—and always won.

'Toujours allant et souffrant' was his definition of himself. He hardly ever made a happier.

In the present case, his disease was of that confluent type which a couple of months earlier had killed de Génonville. Voltaire was very ill. He went so far, he said, as to call the *curé*, make his confession, and his will, 'which, you will well believe, was very short.'

But he was placed under the enlightened care of a Doctor Gervasi, physician to the Cardinal de Rohan, who saved his life with much lemonade and more common-sense.

Voltaire had always that interest in medicine which by no means implies faith in doctors. With two famous exceptions — Gervasi was one — he mistrusted that eighteenth-century faculty as it deserved to be mistrusted. He wrote afterwards a very minute description of his symptoms and treatment for the benefit of an old Baron de Breteuil, the father of Madame du Châtelet.

Adrienne Lecouvreur, it is said, who once had been something more than Voltaire's friend, never left his bedside until Theriot, whom she had summoned, came to be with him.

The Maisons were prodigal of kindnesses. The day after he was out of absolute danger, the patient was writing verses. On the twenty-sixth day from his seizure, that is December 1, 1723, he left for Paris. He was not more than two hundred feet away from the château when the wing he had been occupying caught fire and was burnt to the ground.

As such accidental disinfectants were the only ones known to that age, the conflagration was a blessing in disguise. But Voltaire naturally felt overwhelmed with compunction, as if he had burnt the château

himself. As for the Maisons, the letters they wrote him are examples of that exquisite grace and tact known to complete perfection only to France, and to the France before the Revolution.

In the very early days of 1724 certain innocent-looking, plodding agricultural vans arrived in Paris from Rouen. By the exertions of Madame de Bernières the great packages they contained got through the *douane*—somehow. Theriot was ready in the capital with his two thousand bindings. Voltaire's injunctions that his child should be properly clad had not been in vain.

The August of 1723 had seen the death of Cardinal Dubois; the December the death of the Regent. Surely the time was favourable! The censor had condemned the book—what advertisement could be better?

And lo! on a sudden the 'League' was all over the city—on the toilet tables of the women, in the salons, in the coffee-houses; ay, and in the King's palace itself. It was of course a thousand times more tempting and delicious for being forbidden fruit.

Was it absurdly imitated from the 'Æneid'? Did Henry of Navarre and Elizabeth of England, who never met in real life, meet in the poem for an immense interview? Well, what of that? It was daring, impetuous, and prohibited. That was enough. It was soon all over Europe, translated into many languages, fulsomely admired, parodied, burlesqued, abused, pirated, copied. It had all the successes. A year later Voltaire could say truthfully in his airy manner that he had made poetry the fashion.

The production of his tragedy 'Mariamne' at the Comédie Française in this March of 1724 came like



a dash of cold water on his rising spirits. It was a failure. A wag in the pit spoilt the critical moment of the heroine's death with a foolish *mot*.

The author withdrew 'Mariamne' to rewrite it, as was his indefatigable fashion, and went to recover his disappointment and his always ailing health at the waters of Forges, near Rouen, whither he was accompanied by the young Duke of Richelieu.

At Forges the invalid drank the waters, lost his money at pharaoh, wrote a gay little comedy called 'L'Indiscret,' and made the acquaintance of the French Court, then at Chantilly, near Forges.

The French Court then consisted of a King of fourteen; the Duke of Bourbon, who had obtained the post of Prime Minister simply by asking for it; and the Duke's mistress, Madame de Prie. The mistress may be said to have ruled the kingdom, since she ruled the Duke, and the Duke ruled the King.

This wary Voltaire propitiated her, dedicated to her 'L'Indiscret,' and made her his very useful friend. Drinking the waters ('There is more vitriol in a bottle of Forges water than in a bottle of ink,' he wrote; 'and I do not believe ink is so very good for the health') was brought to a tragic conclusion by the Duc de Melun, who was out hunting with Richelieu, being gored to death by a stag. The hunt was at Chantilly, and the unhappy Melun died in the arms of the Duke of Bourbon and in the presence of the Court. Voltaire, who never abandoned a friend, stayed another fortnight to console Richelieu, and then went back to Paris, which he had reached by August 15.

He had a lodging in the Rue de Beaune now, but the unbearable noise of the street drove him into an *hôtel garni*, and the discomforts of the *hôtel garni* back again



to the Rue de Beaune. Finally, he completed an arrangement begun the year before, and rented a room from the Bernières in their noisy house.

—Wherever he was, he was working as usual. He rewrote 'Mariamne.' He obtained for Theriot the offer of the secretaryship to Richelieu—Richelieu having been appointed ambassador to Vienna. And M. Theriot is too idle to be bothered with regular work, and twice declines the offer. Voltaire was not a little mortified, and found forgiveness difficult; but he forgave. His letters on the subject are an admirable lesson in the arts of friendship and of forbearance.

In April of the next year, 1725, the rewritten 'Mariamne' was produced, with that gay little *bagatelle*, 'L'Indiscret,' after it. 'L'Indiscret' was said to justify its name in that it took too much liberty with the upper classes. 'Mariamne' was very fairly successful now. But, after all, the author had had it and 'L'Indiscret,' as well as the 'Henriade,' all printed at his own expense, and at a very great expense. Fame, he observed, was agreeable but not nourishing. His thrifty soul began to look out for the nourishment.

In this summer of 1725 Louis XV., aged fifteen, was to be married to Marie Leczinska, aged twenty-one, daughter of Stanislas, ex-King of Poland. Madame de Prie gave Voltaire the refusal of rooms in her house at Fontainebleau, where the royal honeymoon was to be spent. Here was an opportunity! He had said not a year ago that he had renounced Courts for ever through the weakness of his stomach and the strength of his reason.

But in many respects, and in this respect above all, he was nothing if not inconsistent. He cried for royal favour as a spoilt child cries for the moon; and when

he had it, it bored, wearied, and irritated him. But in his day, if the king, and the person who ruled the king, did not smile on talent, talent had small chance of success. 'To make one's fortune,' Voltaire wrote bitterly hereafter, 'it is better to speak four words to the king's mistress than to write a hundred volumes.'

So on August 27, 1725, he came up to Madame de Prie's house at Fontainebleau. The festivities were in full swing, though the marriage was yet to come. Voltaire was one-and-thirty. He was there by his own choice. He knew himself to be for the first time in his life well placed. Yet his visit had not lasted three days when he wished himself away again. There was a dreadful rumour, too, that all the pensions were to be discontinued, and a new tax imposed instead to pay for the bride's chifions! Then Voltaire wrote a little *divertissement* to amuse the royalties, and the master of the ceremonies preferred 'Le Médecin Malgré Lui.' On Wednesday, September 5, the wedding took place. Then the bride accorded her gracious permission to M. de Voltaire to dedicate to her 'Œdipe' and 'Mariamne.' Things were a little better! Her father, with whom Voltaire was to have much to do hereafter, begged for a copy of the 'Henriade' on his daughter's recommendation. Voltaire was presented to her Majesty. Things were better still! 'She has wept at "Mariamne," she has laughed at "L'Indiscret," she talks to me often, she calls me her "poor Voltaire." ' Charming! charming! but just a little bit—well, unsubstantial. And then she allowed her poet a pension of fifteen hundred livres.

Voltaire's state of mind at Court was the state of mind of many—perhaps of most—courtiers. It is a dreadful bore to be here—but it is very advantageous!



LOUIS XV.

*From the Picture by Carle Van Loo in the Museum at Versailles.*





The cage is really so exquisitely gilded that one must try not to see the bars through the gilt! I want to get out, and I could get out—but I am so very lucky to be here, and so many people envy me, that I certainly will *not*. What an inexplicable and yet what a very common state of mind it is!

Voltaire could now count on the friendship, not only of the Queen, but of Madame de Prie, and of the minister Duverney. He was a pensioner of both their Majesties. The Court acknowledged him the first poet in France. Epigrams and the Bastille were in the background. He had hopes of being useful to his friends.

All this was not ungenerous payment for three months' ennui at the finest Court in the world. But was it sufficient? Voltaire had indeed his gift of satiric observation to make the dullest entertainments amusing. 'The Queen is every day assassinated with Pindaric odes, sonnets, epistles, and epithalamiums,' he wrote; 'I should think she takes the poets for the Court fools; and if she does she is right, for it is a great folly for a man of letters to be here.' The boredom was stronger than the satisfaction after all. To hang about in the antechamber, tickling the jaded fancy of the Court gentlemen with one's *mots*—to try and rouse the sleepy selfishness of a callow king with one's finest wit—to flatter and cajole a duke's mistress and a poor, honest, simple little foreigner because she happened to be a king's wife—to play for apples of Sodom that turned to dust and ashes at one's touch—was it worth while? 'It is better to be a lackey of wits than a wit of lackeys'—better to do any work than none—better any life than this narcotic sleep of easy idleness. In Voltaire's ear that siren, Verse, was always whispering and calling him away. In his heart were passionate convictions

throbbing to be spoken. He had been glad to go to Court. He was more than glad to get away.

His zeal for a fight must have been more to the fore than ever after those three months of amiable apathy. He had it soon enough.

It was in the December of 1725 that the great Cardinal de Rohan, meeting this lean, brilliant, impertinent upstart of an author at the opera, said to him scornfully, 'M. de Voltaire—Arouet—whatever your name is——?'

Cardinal de Rohan was himself the representative of the haughtiest and most illustrious family in France, and predecessor of that Rohan who was to drag its pride through the mud of the episode of the Diamond Necklace.

A middle-aged debauchee; 'a degenerate plant, a coward and a usurer'—in the vigorous words of a contemporary—was this great Cardinal whom Voltaire met that night,

He made no answer at the moment. Two days after, at the Comédie Française—most likely in Adrienne Lecouvreur's box there—Rohan repeated the question.

'I do not drag about a great name, but I know how to honour the name I bear,' was the answer. There is another version of it: 'I begin my name; the Chevalier de Rohan finishes his.' Or, as Voltaire himself wrote after in 'Rome Sauvée':

My name begins with me : your honour fend  
Lest yours with you shall have an end.

The answer was at least one which made the Cardinal raise his cane; and Voltaire clapped his hand on his sword. Adrienne, of course, fainted, and the incident closed.

A few days later Voltaire was dining with the Duke of Sully. He was called from the table to speak to someone in a carriage outside. He went unsuspectingly enough. A couple of Rohan's lackeys fell on him and beat him over the shoulders. Rohan, it is said, looked out of the window of his coach and called out: 'Don't hit his head! something good may come out of that!' And the bystanders, cringing to rank and success as they needs must, observed admiringly, 'The noble lord!' Voltaire, beside himself with fury, flung off his assailants at last, rushed back to Sully, begged him to redress the wrong, to go to the police, to speak to the minister. Voltaire had been as 'a son of the house' for ten years, and had immortalised Sully's ancestors in the 'Henriade.' But Sully was not going to brave the wrath of such a great man as his cousin Rohan for a *bourgeois* author with a talent for getting into disgrace. Voltaire left the house—never to enter it again. He went straight to the opera, where he knew he would find Madame de Prie, told her his story, and enlisted her sympathy. For a few days it seemed as if she would succeed in getting her lover, the Duke of Bourbon's, influence for Voltaire. But the friends of Rohan showed the Duke an epigram on his one eye, which sounded clever enough to be Voltaire's, and ruined his credit at once. He was baffled on every side. Marais, that keen old legal writer of memoirs, declares that, though he showed himself as much as he could in town and Court, no one pitied him and his so-called friends turned their backs. He had been publicly caned! He was ridiculous! And the fear of being absurd was a thousand times stronger than the fear of hell in eighteenth-century Paris. Any other but Voltaire would have hidden his



head in obscurity and have been thankful to be forgotten.

But with this man an insult raised all the vivid intensity of his nature. 'God take care of my friends,' said he; 'I can look after my enemies myself.' For more than three months he led a life of feverish indignation and was every moment busy with revenge. He learnt fencing. He had no aptitude for any bodily exercise. But he perfected himself in this one with all the persistency and thoroughness of his nature. If he was not normally courageous he had plenty of daring now. The Rohans, anyhow, feared him so much that they kept him under police supervision. On April 16, 1726, the lieutenant of police recorded that Voltaire intended to insult Rohan with *éclat* and at once; that he was living at his fencing master's, but continually changing his residence. On April 17 Voltaire went to Adrienne Lecouvreur's box at the Comédie, where he knew he would find Rohan. Theriot accompanied him and stood without the box, but where he could hear everything. 'Sir,' said Voltaire, 'if you have not forgotten the outrage of which I complain, I hope you will give me satisfaction.' The great man agreed. The hour fixed was nine o'clock the next morning; the place, St. Martin's Gate. But before that, Voltaire found himself for the second time in the Bastille. One can hardly fancy a meaner revenge. By March 28, 1726, the influence, cunning, and poltroonery of Rohan had succeeded in getting signed the warrant for his enemy's arrest and detention. Rohan, in fact, was a great noble; and Voltaire, as his rival playwright Piron said of himself, was 'nothing, not even an Academician.' Armand and his faction were only too glad to be rid of such a stormy petrel.



It is not hard to understand what a passion against the bitter injustice of his gorgeous day must have surged in Voltaire's heart. 'You do not hear in England,' he wrote but a very short time after, 'of *haute*, *moyenne*, and *basse* justice.' It was in fact literally true that in France at that period there was not only really, but avowedly, one 'justice' for the noble, another for the *bourgeois*, and a third for the *canaille*. Voltaire was in the Bastille only a fortnight. He was very well treated. 'Everyone he knew,' wrote Delaunay the governor, came to see him; so his visitors had to be limited to six a day. Theriot brought him English books. He dined at Delaunay's table. Also imprisoned in the Bastille was the famous Madame de Tencin—young, clever, and corrupt. 'We were like Pyramus and Thisbe,' Voltaire wrote, 'only we did not kiss each other through the chink in the wall.' He could still write gaily. As some people never speak without a stammer, Voltaire never spoke without a jest. But what food in his heart for new strange thought! Under what crushing laws was this great French people bound in darkness, wretchedness, ignorance! 'We are born in slavery and die in it.' It has been said that Voltaire left France a poet and returned from England a philosopher. But that fortnight in the Bastille must have made him realise, if he had not known already, that he was born for a destiny far weightier and greater than that of a Corneille or a Racine.

'What is done with people who forge *lettres de cachet*?' he asked the lieutenant of police one day, when he was in prison. 'They are hanged.' 'Good!' was the answer, 'in anticipation of the time when those who sign genuine ones shall be hanged too.'

A few days after his imprisonment he wrote to the Minister of the Department of Paris:

‘Sieur de Voltaire humbly represents that he has been assaulted by the brave Chevalier de Rohan, assisted by six cut-throats, behind whom the chevalier was courageously posted; and that ever since Sieur de Voltaire has tried to repair, not his own honour, but that of the chevalier, which has proved too difficult.’

He went on to beg permission to go to England. His order of liberty was signed on April 29, 1726. But there were many formalities to be observed before it could be put into execution. On May 2 Delaunay received it with its accompanying conditions. Voltaire was free—to go to England, accompanied as far as Calais by Condé, one of the turnkeys of the Bastille, to see that he really *did* go there.

The businesslike prisoner asked Madame de Bernières to lend him her travelling carriage to take him to Calais. She, Madame du Deffand, and Theriot came to say good-bye to him. He left the Bastille on May 3. On May 5 he was writing to Theriot from Calais. He stayed there three or four days, and about the end of the first week in May 1726 landed at Greenwich.

## CHAPTER V

## ENGLAND, AND THE 'ENGLISH LETTERS'

It was the last year of the reign of George I. Swift was Dean of St. Patrick's. Pope was writing that masterpiece of brilliant malice, the 'Dunciad,' at Twickenham. Gay, Young, and Thomson were in the plenitude of their poetic powers. Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough, was compiling her memoirs at Blenheim. Bolingbroke, Hervey, and the Walpoles shed their lustre on politics. Even at the boorish Court there was one brilliant woman—Caroline, Princess of Wales. Newton was near his dying. And Locke being dead yet spoke.

It was one of those rare spring days, with a cloudless sky and a soft west wind, when Voltaire first set foot in England. Greenwich was *en fête*, with its Fair in full progress—Olympian games and the pretty daughters of the people, whom, in their gala dress, the traveller mistook for fine ladies. When he met the fine ladies that very evening in London, most likely at the house of his old friend Lord Bolingbroke, their hauteur and malice disgusted him, and he said very frankly that he preferred the maidens of Greenwich.

He tells how the very next morning he went to a coffee-house in the City, and gives a gay description of the phlegmatic apathy of the company. If they were laughing in their sleeves at the foreigner, the foreigner's

description of them remains to-day a notable example of that keen, clear-cut, airy, bantering humour of which he was so perfect a master.

But if he wrote lightly hereafter, his mood when he landed in England was no laughing one.

This *vif* and sensitive child of fortune could not forget that he was an exile—and exiled unjustly. His pensions both from King and Queen had been stopped. He had an exchange letter on a Jew in London, but before he presented it the Jew was bankrupt and could not pay him, and he was forced to accept a few guineas King George I. 'had the generosity to give me.' His health was as indifferent as usual. He was in a country of which he knew little or nothing of the language or the customs. He had begun the world brilliantly perhaps, but he had greatly fallen. Those first few weeks in England are likely to have been among the unhappiest in his life.

He had been on English shores but a very short time when he slipped back *incognito* to Paris (he had promised the paternal government to *go* to England, not to *stay* there), and, with his life in his hands, waited about in the capital for two months for the man Rohan, 'whom the instinct of his cowardice hid from me.' Theriot knew of the escapade, but no one else. Voltaire wrote him an account of it on August 12, 1726.

He was hardly back in England again when, in September and in the first budget of letters he had had in his exile, he received the news of the death of his sister Catherine. She was nine years older than himself. She had long been married to M. Mignot, and had children and cares of her own to engross her affections and her thoughts. It does not seem that



Voltaire had of late seen very much of her. But all the mothering he had had since he was seven years old she had given him. Her death filled his soul with a gloomy despair. 'I should have died and she have lived,' he wrote to Madame de Bernières. 'It was a mistake of destiny.' To the end of his days he benefited her children with a large generosity. Bearing evident reference to her death is that letter, called the Letter of Consolation, written from England in 1728 to a friend in sorrow. No reader of it who has himself suffered will doubt that its writer knew how to suffer too, and will find in that wise and patient philosophy a soothing of the troubles common to a Voltaire and to all men.

He had plenty of introductions in England. His acquaintance with the Count de Morville, the intimate of the Walpoles, gave him the *entrée* of the great Whig houses. Bolingbroke, who had returned from France in 1723, would present him to the Tories. He further knew, it is said, Lord Stair and Bishop Atterbury. He had a talent—that delightful French talent—for making new friends. And he was soon engrossed in an astounding application to the English language, and a study of its government, laws, literature, and progress which remains the best ever made by a Frenchman.

It is doubtful if, when he landed here in May 1726, he knew a single syllable of English except what he had gathered from the English books Theriot had procured for him when he was in the Bastille. There is a letter to a wine merchant, in very bad English certainly, but still in English, which he is supposed to have written when he had been at the most a few months in England.

The year 1726 was not out when he was writing to other friends in that intricate tongue and attacking its idioms with a splendid dash and audacity.

In 1727 he composed some melodious English verses to Lady Harley; and in his English letters of this and the next year to Theriot and others it will be seen that the language was sufficiently his own for him to stamp it with his inimitable style. Authorities differ as to how good or how bad was the accent with which he spoke.

He is said, when he discovered that the word 'plague' was pronounced as one syllable, to have wished that plague would take one half of the language and ague the other; and to have complained a good deal of a tongue in which a word spelt *handkerchief* was pronounced 'ankicher. That he was fluent in it there is no doubt. An<sup>n</sup> uncharitable person declared that he had soon mastered the language, even to the oaths and curses. Why not? Oaths and curses adorned the polite conversation of the day, and why should a Voltaire omit them? But besides that dinner-table English he could soon speak easily the very different English required for discussing science, philosophy, religion, —the speciality of an English expert, in that expert's mother tongue.

Soon after he returned to France he declared, in the dedication of his play 'Brutus' to Lord Bolingbroke, that, having 'passed two years in a constant study of the English language,' he found it awkward to write in French. 'I was almost accustomed to think in English.'

Thirty years after he had left England behind him for ever, he wrote English letters to English friends. He quarrelled in that tongue with his mistress in

middle life, wrote a couplet in it when he was eighty, and talked in it with his friends in his extreme old age.

He made his headquarters at Wandsworth, already a colony of French refugees, with one Everard Falkener, whom he had met in Paris, the best type of an English merchant, cultivated, hospitable, enlightened. The two bore each other a lifelong friendship. The visitor was never of the idle kind, waiting about to be amused. He was always, on the other hand, indefatigably busy. He was supremely interested in everything, greedy of information, matchlessly quick to observe. Besides, he could never have been very long together at Falkener's Wandsworth villa.

Three months out of the thirty-four he spent in England he stayed at Lord Peterborough's. He was constantly at Lord Bolingbroke's, either at his town house in Pall Mall or in the country. He speaks himself of having known Bishop Berkeley, and Gay of the 'Beggar's Opera.' Before he left England he had visited almost every celebrated person in it.

It is easy to understand Voltaire's passionate admiration for a country in which genius was everywhere the best passport to glory, riches, and honour. He had lived under a system so different! Here his own talent immediately procured him an entrance into that noblest aristocracy, the aristocracy of intellect. When was it that he went to stay at Bubb Dodington's at Eastbury in Dorsetshire, and at that Liberty Hall of the Muses met Young of the 'Night Thoughts' and Thomson of the 'Seasons'? If any writer put the whole of himself into his writings and could be judged by them alone, one might well wonder what the man who was, to be, English parson and author of those solemn



religious couplets of the 'Thoughts,' had in common with the sceptical, cynic Frenchman of the 'Epistle to Uranie.' The one was as brilliant a conversationalist as the other, it seems. As for the 'Seasons,' though Voltaire politely praised them, he considered Nature an ill-chosen subject for a Scotchman who knew nothing of the warmth and the glow of the South.

At Lord Peterborough's Voltaire met Swift—'Rabelais in his Senses,' that greater than any Rabelais—'one of the most extraordinary men that England has produced.' That was Voltaire's judgment of him. He did not like him the less because he was 'a priest and mocked at everything.' At bottom, the dark and awful genius of Swift and the vivid and passionate inspiration of Voltaire had something in common. At Peterborough's table there sat then the two finest masters of invective who ever lived.

Voltaire was still quite new to the country when he made the acquaintance of little, crooked, papist Mr. Pope of Twit'nam. It has been maliciously said that on the occasion the visitor talked so blasphemously and indecently that he sent Pope's poor old mother shuddering from the room. But as at the time Voltaire did not know English and Pope and his mother did not know French, the story may be taken for what it is worth. A great and very natural admiration had the French author, to whom precision, the unities, and poetical neatness were so dear, for the polished easy rhythm of Mr. Pope; but that did not prevent him, long after, when he was talking to James Boswell of Auchinleck at Ferney, from diagnosing the respective merits of Pope and Dryden, in a truly Voltairian criticism. 'Pope drives a handsome chariot with a couple of neat nags, and Dryden a coach and six



stately horses.' Nor did his love of Mr. Pope's style prevent him loathing Mr. Pope's philosophy.

One day he went to see old Sarah Marlborough at Blenheim, and audaciously asked her to let him see the memoirs she was writing. 'You must wait,' answered Sarah; 'I am just altering my account of Queen Anne's character. I have begun to love her again since the present lot have become our rulers.' Is it hard to fancy the delighted cynic humour on her guest's shrewd face at that naïve reply?

Goldsmith says that she *did* show him the memoirs, and when he remonstrated with her for abusing her friends therein, seized them out of his hands in a rage. 'I thought the man had sense, but I find him at bottom either a fool or a philosopher.'

Presently Gay was reading aloud to him that 'Beggar's Opera' before its publication; and he went to see old Congreve, who spoke of his plays as trifles beneath notice, 'and told me to look upon him merely as a private gentleman.' That literary snobbishness was very little to the taste of a Voltaire. 'If you had the misfortune to be only a gentleman like any other,' he answered, 'I should never have come to see you.' It is to be hoped the foolish old playwright felt duly snubbed.

The great Lord Chesterfield—'the only Englishman who ever recommended the art of pleasing as the first duty of life'—invited Voltaire to dinner. When he was asked a second time, he had to decline, as the gratuities expected by the servants were too much for his slenderly equipped pockets.

He visited Newton's niece, Mrs. Conduit, who told him the famous story of Newton and the apple. Voltaire twice repeated it in his works, and thus

preserved it for posterity. He frequently met and talked with Newton's friend and disciple, Clarke.

In 1727 he was introduced at the English Court. Had he not dedicated 'Œdipe' to its King? Just as in 1728 he was to dedicate his English edition of the 'Henriade' to 'that amiable philosopher on the throne,' Caroline, the wife of George II. At Court, doubtless, he met that lean malice, my Lord Hervey, and Lady Hervey, 'beautiful Molly Lepell.' He met everybody, in fact, and saw everything. He went to Newmarket races and to a Quakers' meeting. He was continually at the play. He mixed with bishops and boatmen, lords, play-actors, merchants, and politicians. When on one of his rambles round London he was insulted by a mob, he mounted on a few handy steps: 'Brave Englishmen!' said he, 'am I not already unfortunate enough in not having been born among you?' And they were with him at once.

Perhaps he was not sorry to get away from the wits and the parties, to the quiet of Falkener's villa. He had always something better to do than to be a social light for his own or other men's entertainment.

When he was at Wandsworth he wrote, in English prose, the first act of 'Brutus.' In these thirty-four months he composed nearly the whole of his 'History of Charles XII.' of Sweden. In 1727 he took up his abode for a time at the Sign of the White Peruke, Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, that he might the more conveniently arrange for the publication by subscription of the new edition of his 'Henriade.' 'The English generally make good their words and promises,' he said long after. They did in 1728. The book went into three editions. From them Voltaire had omitted the

tale of the noble exploits of Rosny, the ancestor of his false friend, Sully.

Swift pushed the 'Henriade' in Ireland. The English were inclined to think it too Catholic, as the Catholics had thought it too Protestant. But, in their character of a free and generous people, they bought and read it not the less.

After a few months' residence in the country this amazing Frenchman was turning 'Hudibras' into French verse.

After eighteen months, he wrote, in English, a little volume containing two essays: 'An Essay upon the Civil Wars of France,' and upon 'The Epick Poetry of the European Nations.' A presentation copy of the first edition of this daring little work, published in 1727, may still be seen in the British Museum with a few words in Voltaire's handwriting in the corner—'to Sr. hantslone from his most humble servant voltaire.' Sir Hans Sloane was the President of the Royal Society. This book is now so rare as to be practically unobtainable. It went into a second edition in 1728, and into a fourth in 1731.

By it, by 'Brutus,' and the 'Henriade' Voltaire gained a sum of about two thousand pounds.

The chronology of the events of his English visit remains, and must remain, very imperfect. He wrote very few letters during that period and dates are not the *forte* of his English hosts. So much, however, is certain. He arrived in England about the end of the first week in May 1726. By September, he had paid his stolen visit to France and returned to these shores. In January 1727 he was presented at Court. On March 28 he was at Newton's lying in state in Westminster Abbey. In July the French authorities gave him



permission to return to France for a while to see to some business, but he did not go. He spent the greater part of the year preparing his English edition of the 'Henriade' and writing 'Charles XII.' In December 1727 appeared the two English essays. 1728 saw the publication of the English edition of his 'Henriade.'

Archibald Ballantyne's 'Voltaire's Visit to England' gives the best and most exhaustive account of that visit yet published.

By far the most momentous and the most influential, both on Voltaire's own fortunes and on the public intellect, of any of his works written for the most part in England, were his 'English Letters' or the 'Philosophical Letters.'

They were originally written to Theriot; but they must always have been meant for publication. They are not the best example, but they are no bad example, of the Voltairian manner—polished, easy, witty, sarcastic, not so much daring in word as daring in meaning, more remarkable for what they imply than for what they say—yet of all letters in the world, perhaps, those which have had the most far-reaching as well as the profoundest effect on the human mind.

Read casually, they are chiefly remarkable for their luminous and amusing criticisms on the genius of England, and on the men and events of that day.

Voltaire found Shakespeare exactly, after all, what a Voltaire *would* have found him—'nature and sublimity,' 'force and fecundity,' 'an amazing genius'—he was too great a genius himself not to recognise in a Shakespeare such matchless traits as these. But Voltaire was also an eighteenth-century Frenchman, with his dramatic gift pinioned by the unities, by a hundred prim, foolish and artificial rules, and he was



the writer who above all other writers valued style, polish, finish, and culture. How should he have forgiven Shakespeare what he called his 'heavy grossness,' his 'barbarisms,' his 'monstrosities'? Voltaire did not know, with the moderns, that many of the clowns and the clownish jokes to which he took a just objection, were interpolations, not Shakespeare himself. And what wonder that this most impressionable child of a country and an age where an abstraction called Taste was as a god, should have missed its polite influence in a Shakespeare, and have found the rugged grandeur of that vast intelligence imperfect without it? Not the less, it was Voltaire who first revealed this man, who had been 'the ruin of the English stage,' to the French; who copied and translated him; and then abused him so fiercely in the famous preface to 'Semiramis' and the quarrel with Letourneur, as to make him of as supreme an interest on the Continent as in his own country.

Voltaire wrote one admirable letter 'On Mr. Pope and other famous Poets,' another 'On Comedy,' a third 'On Tragedy,' and a fourth 'On Nobles who cultivate Literature.' He praised Swift; adored 'the judicious Mr. Addison;' and did due homage to Wycherley and Congreve. But if the 'English Letters' had been nothing but a series of literary criticisms, however brilliant, they would not have been the Letters which made Lafayette a republican at nine, and which Heine spoke of as a stepping-stone to the Revolution.

In the 'Henriade' the bird's heart had throbbed against the bars of the cage; in the 'English Letters' it had found the gate of liberty and taken its first sweeping flight through free air.

Voltaire came straight from the Bastille to the

most liberal and enlightened country in the world. What wonder that he conceived that hero worship for England and the English which no time could change, and which in his old age at Ferney was still a burning and a shining light?

He was from the first an impassioned admirer of almost every Anglican institution. 'The English, as a free people, chose their own road to heaven.' 'You do not see any imbeciles here who put their souls into the keeping of others.'

'You have no priests then?' said I. 'No, friend,' answered the Quaker; 'and we get on very well without them.' 'When the English clergy know that in France young men famous for their excesses and raised to the prelature by the intrigues of women, make love publicly, amuse themselves by composing love songs, give every day elaborate and elegant suppers and go straight from them to ask the illumination of the Holy Spirit and boldly call themselves successors of the Apostles, they thank God that they are Protestants. But they are vile heretics, fit for burning with all devils, as Master François Rabelais said; that is why I do not mix myself up with their affairs.'

The last touches are admirably Voltairian.

The live-and-let-live policy of a country where thirty religions dwelt together quite amicably and comfortably could not but appeal to the man who was Armand's brother and who remembered Unigenitus.

As for the government—what a contrast he saw there too! In this country the sovereign was only powerful to do good 'with his hands tied from doing evil;' the great were 'great without insolence and without vassals;' and 'the people share in the government without disorder.' What a contrast indeed!

what a glaring contrast! The pen trembled in the man's nervous hand as he wrote; and his soul was on fire. 'It has taken seas of blood to drown the idol of despotism; but the English do not think they have bought their laws too dearly.' How much more dearly France was to buy hers, this man, who himself expended the work and genius of his life to gain Frenchmen a little liberty, had no idea. He had seen Newton buried at Westminster with the honours due to so great a genius. When Voltaire was very old it is said 'his eye would grow bright and his cheek flush' when he said that he had once lived in a land where 'a professor of mathematics, only because he was great in his vocation,' had been buried 'like a king who had done good to his subjects.'

What a country to live in! to be proud of! where there were better ways to glory than the favour of a royal mistress or the unearned virtue of an ancestral name!

He saw Mrs. Oldfield, the actress, buried with the honours due to her far different and very inferior talent. Perhaps the honours were greater than her desert. But Voltaire, with his passion for the stage, was not the man to think of that.

Thirty-five years later he recalled how he had heard when in England that the daughter of the poet Milton was in London—old, ill, and poor. 'In a quarter of an hour she was rich.'

'What would you have done if you had been born in Spain?' said his secretary to Voltaire long after. 'I would have gone to mass every day: kissed the monks' robes: and set fire to their convents. I was not made to live in Spain, nor in France.' 'Where then?' 'In England.'



But if Voltaire loved the tolerant English religion and the liberal English government and the generous English people, he loved far more 'the noble liberty of thinking.' His Letters on Bacon and on Locke, on Descartes and Newton, on the History of Attraction and on Newton's Optics, are a worship of that free thought that dared to doubt, that searched and tried the old truths which men believed because they *were* old and for no better reason, and which found them too often to be no truths, but a prejudice, a delusion, and a lie. Voltaire passionately declared that it was the theologians, and not the Lockes, the Bayles, the Hobbes, the Spinozas, who sowed 'discord in a state.' He spoke of Locke as 'the wisest of human beings;' of Bacon as 'the father of experimental philosophy.' 'A catechism reveals God to children,' he said; 'but Newton has revealed Him to sages.' 'Before Locke, the great philosophers had positively decided what the soul of man is, but as they did not know in the least, it is only natural they should all have been of different opinions. . . . Locke dares sometimes to speak positively but he also dares to doubt.' 'How I love English daring!' he cried *à propos* of Swift's 'Tale of a Tub.' 'How I love people who say what they think! We only half live if we dare only half think.'

Voltaire was fully alive at all events. However widely one may differ from his opinions they are at least entitled to respect. They were passionately genuine, the vivid convictions of his soul. He was no *dilettante*, fine-gentleman unbeliever—too bored and idle to find in the world 'the footmarks of a God.' He was from this time henceforth and always one of the most zealous seekers after truth who ever lived. It was to be no more 'a fountain sealed;' no more a luxury for a few, but



the common property of all. To free Frenchmen by bringing to them the light and knowledge of England—to destroy, so far as in him lay, everywhere and for all men, darkness, ignorance and superstition—that was the Voltairian mission. 'He swore to devote his life to that end, and kept his word.'

## CHAPTER VI

PLAYS, A BURLESQUE, AND THE APPEARANCE  
OF THE 'LETTERS'

IN the middle of March 1729 there was a man calling himself M. Sansons, living over a wigmaker's at St. Germain-en-Laye. At the end of the month M. Sansons came to Paris; and lived for a while at the house of one of his father's old clerks. Being so advised by his friends he applied for a warrant, annulling his order of exile. He obtained it; and lo! M. de Voltaire, after an absence of nearly three years, is returned from his English travels, and once more at work on his profession in the capital.

He had no thought at present of bringing out those 'English Letters.' The time was not yet ripe; and discretion here, certainly, was the better part of valour. He applied himself instead to his 'Charles XII.' He spoke of it himself as his favourite work, and 'the one for which I have the bowels of a father.' Its breathless race of incident swept him along, and he had hardly time even to be sociable. Refusing one of Theriot's invitations to dinner on May 15, he said that he would drop in at the end of the entertainment 'along with that fool of a Charles XII.' The subject engrossed him, as the subject he had

in hand always engrossed him. Then, since he was no more an exile, he set to work with Theriot to get his pensions restored—and succeeded.

One night when he was out at supper he heard talk of a lottery formed by Desforts, the controller-general. One of the guests observed that anyone who took all the tickets in the lottery would be greatly the gainer. Voltaire was as swift to act as swift to see. He formed a company who bought up all the tickets: and found himself the winner of a large sum. To be sure he had offended Desforts, who was thus written down an ass. So off went the poet to Plombières with Richelieu in August for a visit. When he returned to Paris the squall had blown over, and M. de Voltaire had made an uncommonly successful speculation.

He made others, too, about this period, and never again was in need of money.

In this December of 1729 Voltaire invited the actors of the Comédie Française to dinner and read them his new play, 'Brutus.' It was accepted, rehearsed, and then suddenly and mysteriously withdrawn. Voltaire said there was a plot against it—a cabal of Rohan and his kind, and of Crébillon—famous rival playwright and gloomy tragic poet. But worse than any plot was the feebleness of the play itself and its fatal absence of love interest. The actors themselves thought it unworthy of a Voltaire and his public. Voltaire knew it to be so himself, and at once set about revising and rewriting it.

On March 20, 1730, there died after four days' acute anguish, aged only thirty-eight, the great actress, Adrienne Lecouvreur. Her death was the supreme event of this period of Voltaire's life. Perhaps it was one of the supreme events of his whole life. He had

been, he said, 'her admirer, her friend, her lover.' If the last word is to be taken literally, that relationship had long ceased. But he had for ever a passionate admiration for her talents. The last piece she played in was 'Œdipe,' and she was taken ill upon the stage. Voltaire, with his quick instinct of a passionate pity, hastened to her bedside, and she died in his arms in agonies for which there could be found no remedy. She was an actress, so she could have neither priest nor absolution, and dying thus, was refused Christian burial, and taken without the city at night and 'thrown in the kennel,' like a dead dog.

What wonder if Paris was stirred to its soul? And if Paris was stirred, what must a Voltaire have been? Adrienne, it has been well said, had 'all the virtues but virtue.' She was generous and disinterested to a high degree. She was a woman of supreme talent and achievements. She was at least morally no worse, as she was intellectually far greater, than those kings' mistresses over whose graves prelates had thought it no shame to lift their voices in eulogies and orations, and who had been buried with royal honours and splendour.

In Voltaire's mind England and Mrs. Oldfield's burial were still fresh impressions. Injustice had begun to play the part with him that the lighted torch plays to the faggot. His soul was ablaze at once.

It is not fashionable to look upon him as a man of feeling. In the popular idea he is the scoffer who jeered at everything. Read the 'Poem on the Death of Adrienne Lecouvreur' written, not on the passionate impulse of the moment, but many months later, and see in it a soul stirred to its profoundest depths—the ebullition of a feeling as deep as it is rare.



‘ Shall I for ever see . . . the lightminded French sleeping under the rule of superstition? What! is it only in England that mortals dare to think ?

‘ Men deprive of burial her to whom Greece would have raised altars.’ ‘ The Lecouvreur in London would have had a tomb among genius, kings, and heroes.’ ‘ Ye gods! Why is my country no longer the fatherland of glory and talent ? ’

Such words were enough to endanger its author’s safety.

It was well that when Theriot was showing them about the salons of Paris in June 1731, Voltaire was living *incognito* in Rouen, and was supposed to be in England.

Paris forgot; but not Voltaire. For sixty years he never ceased to try and improve the condition of actors. Thirty years after Adrienne’s death he wrote as if it had happened yesterday: ‘ Actors are paid by the King and excommunicated by the Church; they are commanded by the King to play every evening, and by the Church forbidden to do so at all. If they do not play, they are put into prison; if they do, they are spurned into the kennel. We delight to live with them, and object to be buried with them; we admit them to our tables and exclude them from our cemeteries. It must be allowed we are a very reasonable and consistent nation.’ In his old age, his one dread was not the mysterious Hereafter, but that he too, dying unabsolved, might be ‘ thrown into the gutter like poor Lecouvreur.’

By the spring of 1730 ‘ Charles XII.’ was almost ready for the press. The censor—its satire of current superstition was so very delicate the good man had not noticed it—passed the book.

The author was delighted, and was more than busy in preparing a large edition of the first volume for the press.

By the autumn of 1730, when he had two thousand six hundred copies on the eve of publication, the whole edition was suddenly seized by the paternal government. The censor had passed it! True. But a change in the political outlook made France uncommonly nervous of displeasing Augustus, the usurping King of Poland, of whom Voltaire, forsooth, had spoken disrespectfully. 'It seems to me,' he wrote very reasonably, 'that in *this* country Stanislas [the Queen's father and ex-King] ought to be considered rather than Augustus.'

It is easy to fancy what a maddening irritation such a prohibition, and the delays, worries, and waste of time it caused, must have had on such an impatient and energetic temperament as Voltaire's.

But he never gave up hope, as he never gave up work.

On December 11 of this year 1730 the rewritten 'Brutus' was performed: very favourably received on the first night—by an audience composed entirely of the author's friends—and damned with faint praise on the second. The author had quite enough vanity to be bitterly mortified. But, not the less, he wrote the kindest and most considerate of letters to the terrified *ingénue* of fifteen who had played one of the chief parts hopelessly badly. 'Ce coquin-là,' one of his bitterest enemies said of him, 'has one vice worse than all the rest; he has sometimes virtues.'

The last performance of 'Brutus' took place on January 17, 1731. There had been but fifteen in all. In the Revolution it was revived, and received with tumultuous applause. Its *motif*, that of a father sacrificing his sons for the common good, appealed to

those stirring times of reckless deeds, but not to the cultivated and sentimental *dolce far niente* of 1731.

By February, Voltaire was writing to Cideville at Rouen that the new edition of the 'Henriade' was tacitly permitted in Paris by the authorities. While they had been busy suppressing it, those authorities had also been busy reading and admiring it themselves. Henceforth, it was allowed in France.

In March, M. de Voltaire announced his intention of returning to his dear England, and insinuated that he was going to print 'Charles XII.' at 'Cantorbéry.' In truth, Cideville had found his friend 'a little hole' in Rouen—a very dirty and uncomfortable little hole as it turned out—where he could live *incognito* and superintend the secret printing and publishing of his 'Charles XII.' He removed from the first little hole to the house of Jore, his printer and publisher, with whom he was to have only too many dealings in the future. He passed as an English gentleman. He had the society of Cideville to console him. He was five months in Rouen altogether, from the March of 1731 until the August. One of these months he spent in bed. Part of his time he was in the country. The whole time he was correcting the proof-sheets of the first part of 'Charles XII.' and writing the latter, and composing two tragedies—'The Death of Cæsar' and 'Ériphyle.'

He returned to Paris in August 1731. On September 13 died the noble young Maisons, aged only thirty-one, of the smallpox which had spared him before. 'He died in my arms,' said Voltaire, 'not through the ignorance but through the neglect of the doctors.'

In October the secretly printed 'Charles XII.' was introduced surreptitiously into Paris, as the 'Henriade'



had been. Like the 'Henriade,' it became the mode and was read by all the educated classes ; and soon, in translations, by the educated of other countries as well.

It is indeed a bold and vigorous story. Plenty of anecdote and action—a vivid drama wherein the characters play their parts with extraordinary spirit and energy. In the heat of so many battles the author has no time for reflections. But throughout, not the less, he shows very plainly his contempt for his hero, and his love for all those strange things—peace, liberty, enlightenment—which that hero had done so much to crush.

Many of his facts he had obtained firsthand from the Duchess of Marlborough, who remembered her husband's dealings with Charles ; and from Baron Goertz, who had been Charles's favourite minister and then Voltaire's personal friend.

Voltaire, as has been seen, loved his 'Charles XII.' himself ; and as usual had spared nothing to make it as good as he could.

'My great difficulty,' he wrote, 'has not been to find memoirs, but to sift out the good ones. There is another inconvenience inseparable from writing contemporary history. Every captain of infantry who has served in the armies of Charles XII. and lost his knapsack on a march, thinks I ought to mention it. If the subalterns complain of my silence, the generals and ministers complain of my outspokenness. Whoso writes the history of his own time must expect to be blamed for everything he has said and everything he has not said ; but these little drawbacks should not discourage a man who loves truth and liberty, expects nothing, fears nothing, asks nothing, and who limits his ambition to the cultivation of letters.'

By the December of this year 1731 Voltaire was



staying with a certain gay old Comtesse de Fontaine Martel who had a house in the Palais Royal, of which she made her visitor free, as of her carriage, her opera box, and her fine company.

His friendship with the Bernières had cooled by this time. To be sure, he was no small acquisition to this corrupt old Countess, whose one aim in existence was to be amused if she could. 'To be bored near Voltaire! Ah, Dieu! that is not possible!' said an enthusiastic lady admirer hereafter. He sonneted his hostess now, as only he knew how—delicate, graceful, French, delightful. 'Ériphyle' was performed at her house very early in 1732. The guests were much too polite not to sob at its pathos and applaud it to the echo.

On March 7, 1732, it was played to a public who received it with a very tepid warmth; until the fifth act, of which they unmistakably disapproved. 'One forgives the dessert when the other courses have been passable,' Voltaire wrote cheerily to Cideville. But one of his critics was not far from the truth when he said that if it had not been for its hits at the great, at princes, and at superstition, it would have had nothing of Voltaire in it at all.

It was dull; and Voltaire knew it. He employed the Easter holidays in writing a very good prologue to it. But if a bad dessert cannot spoil a good dinner, a good *hors d'œuvre* will not save a bad one. On May 13 Voltaire wrote to Theriot that he was resolved not even to print it, and it was withdrawn from Jore's hands at the last moment. Some of its material was used in 'Semiramis.'

The author of 'Œdipe,' of the 'Henriade,' and of 'Charles XII.' had already not unnaturally turned

his thoughts to that mistress who was the object of all literary men's hopes, vows, and adorations—the French Academy. By December 1731 there was a vacant chair there. Who had a right to it if not he? He was almost forty years old. He had already done great things; he was ripe to do greater. Even the authorities could not be blind to his deserts and to his powers. Richelieu was his friend, and used all his influence to help him. The thing was as good as done, when by secret malice, or very ill fortune, there appeared in print in the spring of 1732 that luckless ‘Epistle to Uranie,’ written ten years earlier to that fair travelling companion, Madame de Rupelmonde.

There is nothing in that poem but its grace, cleverness, and sincerity which would excite comment if it appeared in a magazine to-day. Voltaire had called it ‘Le Pour et le Contre,’ but it was certainly much more *against* revealed religion than *for* it. Yet it is in no sense offensively anti-Christian. It is not the poem of a scoffer, but of one who seeks truth diligently and ‘gropes through darkness up to God.’

That fact did not soften the authorities in the least.

‘What do you think of it?’ said the Chancellor of France to his secretary.

‘Voltaire ought to be deprived of pen, ink, and paper,’ was the answer. ‘That man has a mind which could destroy a state.’

‘Uncertain Uranie’ had before this solved *her* doubts by going into a convent. Her mentor saw but one course open to him. It was a very characteristic course—and used by him afterwards very freely. He denied the authorship of the ill-omened little work *in toto*; and, true to his principles of doing everything

thoroughly, declared that the Abbé Chaulieu was the writer thereof, and that he (Voltaire) had heard him recite it at the Temple.

Nobody believed the story, it appears. At any rate, the Academy doors remained closed to him.

Many worldly-wise old friends of Voltaire's—Fontenelle and Madame de Tencin among others—took the opportunity of the failure of 'Ériphyle' to beg him about this time to give up that dramatic career for which he was evidently unsuited.

'What answer did you make?' someone said to him.

'None; I brought out "Zaire."'

'Zaire' was written in twenty-two days.

'The subject carried me away with it; the piece wrote itself.' It is a tragedy full of love and pathos, which still in some degree keeps its popularity. It has been ably criticised as being not the best of Voltaire's tragedies, but the most inspired. It reads as if its author were a lover of five-and-twenty—quick with the emotions he describes. 'Whoso paints the passions has felt them,' he said himself. What an unknown Voltaire 'the tender Zaire' must have revealed to his friends! It was his first real dramatic success since 'Œdipe.' It was a greater success than 'Œdipe' had been. At the first performance, indeed, on August 6, 1732, the pit was somewhat noisy, and vociferously called attention to defects arising from hasty writing. But, after all, the play moved the heart. At the fourth performance the author was called from his box to receive the unanimous plaudits of the house. He himself wrote a notice of the play in the 'Mercure'—the first time such a thing had ever been done. On October 14 it was played before the King and Queen



at Fontainebleau. It brought its author much of what he called 'that smoke of vainglory'—for which he had written 'Ériphyle' and 'Brutus' all over again, and in vain. He himself superintended the performance. He was at Court six weeks. 'Mariamne' was also performed; and the 'Gustave' of that rival playwright, Alexis Piron, was *not*. Voltaire met Piron at Court one day. 'Ah! my dear Piron, what are *you* doing here? I have been here three weeks. The other night they played my "Mariamne"; they are going to play "Zaire." How about "Gustave"?' Bitter Piron himself tells the story. It does not sound like truth. An enemy's ill-luck nearly always killed the Voltairian spite at a blow. But if it be true, it is easy to understand that this cool, witty Arouet, the son of the notary, was not precisely popular. While at Court he rewrote his 'English Letters' on 'Newton' and 'Gravitation'; read aloud to Cardinal Fleury, with a few judicious omissions, that one on the Quakers, and corresponded with a man who was now his scientific teacher and, to be, his admired friend and his bitter enemy. His name was Maupertuis.

When Voltaire had returned to his comfortable quarters at the Palais Royal, 'Zaire' was acted there by amateurs in January 1733. Voltaire himself took the part of Lusignan, the heroine's father, in spite of his health, which was so bad that 'I dread being reduced to idleness, which to me would be a terrible disgrace.'

In that very same month of January the Comtesse de Fontaine Martel died very suddenly. She had her card parties and her salon to the last. She was quite old, wicked, godless, charming and generous—a perfect type of her class and her age. Voltaire was at her bed-



side when she died. 'What time is it?' she asked with her last breath. Before she could be answered—'Thank God!' said she, 'whatever time it is, there is somewhere a *rendez-vous*.'

Voltaire said that he lost, by her death, a good house of which he was the master and an income of forty thousand francs which was spent in amusing him.

He stayed on in her house for some time. He was there when there swept over him one of the noisiest hurricanes of all his stormy existence.

In 1731 that envious old exiled J. B. Rousseau had circulated in Paris a very venomous letter on the subject of Voltaire. The brilliant success of 'Zaire' was the signal for him to attack it with fury. The criticism was so manifestly unjust and so manifestly dictated by jealousy, that Voltaire might have been well content to leave it alone. But almost the only thing he could not do was to do nothing. So he wrote 'The Temple of Taste.'

'The Temple of Taste' is a brilliant burlesque, half prose, half verse. Pope's 'Dunciad' is the only English poem with which it can be compared. Its story is that Cardinal Fleury and the poet go together to the 'Temple of Taste' criticising every foible of the age on their way there. Near the entrance they meet the candidates for admission to the 'Temple,' great among whom is J. B. Rousseau.

The 'Temple' is one of the most graceful and easy of the works of an author who always possessed those two qualities in an extraordinary degree. It shows, as no other writing of Voltaire's had yet shown, his delicate and perfect critical judgment. He expresses his damning opinion—so gaily, so charmingly, so

innocently—on many other over-rated celebrities besides Rousseau. The piquancy of the thing lies in the fact that three-fourths of those celebrities were then living. It hits off every passing craze. Every line contains a deadly allusion. Every other word is a *not* almost. No translation can give any idea of the full and deadly effect of that easy, trifling, bantering style. 'The Temple of Taste' is a flame which still leaps and shines, though it burns no more.

By February 'the Temple,' wrote its builder, 'had become a Cathedral.' In April it was in the hands of the censor. Voltaire quite expected to be given a privilege for it. The censor did not seem to see anything objectionable in it.

It is easy to fancy what a success a work so gay, witty, and daring would meet with, when it dropped red-hot from the press, while it was still in the hands of the authorities awaiting the coveted yellow seal. If it *was* a cathedral, it was one which afforded the author no sanctuary. The old dangers and the old outcries, to which he should have been getting wearily used by now, met him as usual. There was a threatened *lettre de cachet*. 'Here is a little villain of a writer who ought to be sent over the sea again,' said Marais.

All Paris was up in arms in fact. 'This "Temple of Taste" has roused up those whom I have not praised enough for their liking,' Voltaire wrote to Theriot on May 1, 'and still more those whom I have not praised at all . . . add to that the crime of having printed this *bagatelle* without a permission, and the anger of the minister against such an outrage; add to that the howlings of the Court and the menace of a *lettre de cachet*, and, with all, you will have but a feeble idea of

the pleasantness of my position and of the protection afforded to literature.'

'I must then rebuild a second Temple,' he added cheerfully; and he positively set to work to do it, missing out some of the stones of offence in the first.

On May 15 he left the late Countess Martel's comfortable house and went to live at the mean lodging of his man of business—'in the worst quarter of Paris in the worst house'—opposite the church of St. Gervais. 'The place is more deafened with the sound of bells than a sacristan,' said he, 'but I shall make so much noise with my lyre the bells will be nothing to me.'

One hardly knows whether to admire more the man's admirable indifference to things material, or that genius for hard work which stood him in as good stead in a garret as in a palace.

He was not long alone in these rooms. He soon had with him two literary *protégés* whom he fed, lodged and entertained 'like my own children.' One of them, Lefèvre, died young. For the other, Linant, Voltaire had done his very best to get the good offices of Madame de Fontaine Martel. But that worldly-wise old person, who had already been much tried by friend Theriot, declined to accommodate Linant in her house. Then Voltaire besought Madame du Deffand for him.

The *protégés* were always going to do great things and never did them. Voltaire believed in them exactly as devout and simple persons will long believe in the reclamation of the irreclaimable. 'I am persuaded,' he had said in that 'Temple of Taste,' 'that if a man does not cultivate a talent it is because he does not possess it; there is no one who does not write poetry if



he is a poet ; or music, if he is a musician.' But his heart was softer than his judgment. Now, as later, he believed in the capacity as in the generosity of his fellows, with an enthusiasm which outlasted experience, and wholly contradicts the gay cynicism of his utterances.

On July 3, 1733, there is a little innocent, ominous sentence in a letter of Voltaire's to Cideville. 'Yesterday I began an epistle in verse on Calumny, dedicated to a very amiable and much calumniated woman.' That nameless lady, who had Voltaire's Richelieu for a lover, had already written to Richelieu highly praising Voltaire's new play, 'Adélaïde du Guesclin.' In this July she, a certain Comte de Forcalquier and a gay young duchess, paid a surprise visit to Voltaire in his dingy lodging which occasioned the poet to break into charming verse and to compare his guests to the three angels who visited Abraham. The summer also saw him busy buying pictures, writing an opera, 'Samson,' to music by Rameau, and rewriting his 'Adélaïde.' It was to have been performed in the April of this 1733, but the illness of the chief actress delayed its appearance, and gave the author more time to correct and improve it.

But paramount in his mind to any opera and tragedy, ay, to any amiable and calumniated woman of fashion too, was his haunting fear, which never left him all through this year, that the 'English Letters,' which were being printed at Rouen privately and under his own supervision, should slip out and become public property before he gave the signal at what he took to be the psychological moment. By July they were already published in England—free England who received them with delight. 'The Letters philoso-



phical, political, critical, poetical, heretical, and diabolical are selling in English in London with great success.' But here?

The outcries against 'The Temple of Taste' were still loud and vehement. Voltaire's terror lest 'our incorrect Jore' should play him false with regard to this far more dangerous work, vibrates passionately in every letter of the period he wrote. 'These cursed Letters,' he called them. They were damned on their reputation alone in Paris, before anyone had seen them. It is almost impossible now to believe that any government should have thought it dangerous to the state and its citizens to understand the theory of gravitation or the principles of light. But, after all, those authorities were not such fools as they looked. Once allow the people to reason, and the Bourbon dynasty would fall like a pack of cards.

The author had already toned down some of his freer utterances. But he could never tone the free soul which breathed in them.

He had 'a mortal aversion to prison,' he wrote. He had a reason, a stronger reason than he had ever had in his life, for wishing to remain quietly in France. But speak his message to the world he must. 'The more liberty one has, the more one wants.' He had tasted of that deep nectar of the gods, and his countrymen must drink of it with him. He feared his gay manner of conveying grave truth would offend. 'If I had not lightened matter, nobody would have been scandalised; but then nobody would have read me.'

The *vif* and anxious author paid Jore and worried him freely enough. And then he tried to propitiate the fickle French public, as he had propitiated it before, by a play. On January 18, 1734, was performed the

long-delayed 'Adélaïde du Guesclin.' The first act was received with hisses, which redoubled in the second. In the fifth, the ruin was completed by one of those *mots* at which a Parisian *parterre* is only too apt. On the second evening Voltaire spoke of himself as attending Adélaïde's funeral. One critic, indeed, and no mean critic, had found the play 'tender, noble, and touching.' But then that critic already looked on Voltaire with eyes more than friendly. 'Adélaïde,' far from smoothing the way for the 'Letters,' was but another stumbling stone in it.

Then the versatile Voltaire, at once a friend and a notary's son, must needs arrange personally for the marriage of his friend Richelieu to Mademoiselle de Guise.

To be sure, Richelieu was *amant volage* if ever man was; but he took Mademoiselle without a *dot*, and the manners of the time were such that neither husband nor wife would in any case have expected fidelity of the other. Voltaire left for Montjeu, near Autun, the residence of the bride's parents, on April 7. 'I have drawn up the contract, so I shall not write any verses,' said he. But he did his duty all the same a few days after, and composed an 'Epithalamium.' The bridegroom left shortly to join his regiment. Among the wedding guests was that old love of Richelieu's, the tender critic of 'Adélaïde,' 'the most amiable and calumniated of women,' Émilie de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet. Between composing love verses for the newly married pair, and perhaps some on his own account, Voltaire enjoyed a brief holiday, idle and content. Then the storm burst in such a clap of thunder as had never shaken even his world before.

By April 24, 1734, the 'English Letters' had

appeared without the slightest warning to the author and with his name on the title-page, and were running through Paris like a fire-brand. Appended was his Letter on the 'Thoughts of Pascal,' in which he had dared to doubt the omniscience and infallibility of that thinker, and which he had done his best to suppress altogether. Jore was thrown into the Bastille. The book was denounced. On June 10 it was publicly burnt in Paris by the hangman as 'scandalous, contrary to religion, to morals, and respect for authority.' Voltaire's lodging in the capital was searched. When the officer arrived to arrest him at Montjeu on May 11 he was told that he had gone five days earlier, that is, on May 6, 1734, to drink the waters of Lorraine, not yet a French possession.

But in reality Voltaire was making his way quietly to the Château of Cirey-sur-Blaise, in Champagne, a country home of the Marquis and the Marquise du Châtelet.

## CHAPTER VII

## MADAME DU CHÂTELET

IN 1706 there was born one Émilie, the daughter of the Baron de Breteuil. Émilie grew up into a tall slip of a girl with very long legs, very bright eyes, very little grace, and a great deal of intelligence. She was about eight years old, and presumably living in Paris with her parents, when she saw one day, possibly at the house of Caumartin, that lean-faced scapegrace, François Marie Arouet, of twenty. Arouet was not yet out of love with Pimpette Dunoyer. Émilie was a child who ought to have been thinking about games and dolls and was thinking, with a quite undesirable precocity, of lessons and learning. The meeting made not the slightest impression on either of them. Arouet went on climbing the steep and rugged way that leads to glory. Émilie learnt Latin and Italian, devoted herself to the Muses, and at fifteen began to write a versified translation of the 'Æneid.'

In the eighteenth century learning was a mode among women which they put on exactly as they put powder on their hair and patches on their cheeks. They talked philosophy as charmingly as they had once talked chiffons. They sentimentalised over the Rights of Men, neglected their children and treated their servants like dogs. Culture was hardly a pose with





GABRIELLE EMILIE DE BRETEUIL.  
MARQUISE DU CHATELET.  
Morte à Lunéville en 1749, âgée de 43 Ans.

*Peint par Marianne Lott.*

*et Gravé par P. G. Leplat.*

MADAME DU CHÂTELET.

*From an Engraving after Marianne Lott.*



them, as it has been with less clever women since, but it was a garment which they wore when and as they chose. There have been few women in any age 'devoted from all eternity to the exact sciences,' impassioned for learning for learning's sake, capable of that keen delight in the discovery of a new truth which is like the delight of the sportsman when he has run his quarry to earth. There were few such women even in the eighteenth century. But there were some: and Émilie de Breteuil was one of them.

She was married at nineteen to the Marquis du Châtelet. It was hardly even an episode in her career. This *bonhomme* was so stupid and so earthy! Madame always appears to have agreed with him well enough. But there were so many other things to think about! First of all, there was a Marquis de Guébriant. When he was false, his vehement young mistress took so much opium that she would have died, but for his timely assistance. The brilliant Duke of Richelieu became her lover presently: and she wore his portrait in a ring and loved him, temporarily, but sincerely enough, and exacted from him, if this girlish Marquise was anything at all like a later Madame du Châtelet, a quite extraordinary amount of attention and devotion. Pretty early in her career she became addicted to that modish pastime, gaming. She played on the spinet and sang to it. She loved dress and had a very bad taste in it. She loved society and talked in it much and brilliantly. She was an amateur actress of no mean ability. She had three children who interfered with her scheme of life not at all and on whom she seems to have wasted none of that effervescent emotion she felt for her lovers. There are many strange portraits in the great gallery of eighteenth-century France before the

Revolution, but no one stranger than that of this bony, long-limbed woman, whose flashing intelligence made her harsh-featured face almost beautiful, who was familiar with Horace and Virgil, with Cicero, Tasso and Ariosto, with Locke, with Newton and with Euclid—a philosopher with a passion for metaphysics—a being at once excitable and sensual, who united to an entire lack of the moral sense, intellectual passions the most pure and sincere that ever raised a woman above the pettiness, the backbitings and the meannesses common to her sex.

In 1731, before Voltaire knew her personally, her learned reputation had reached him and he had written her some lines on the Epic Poets. To 1732 belongs an ‘Ode on Fanaticism,’ also addressed to the ‘charming and sublime Émilie.’

Early in 1733 when Madame was seven-and-twenty years old, studying mathematics under Maupertuis, one of the courtiers of the Duchesse du Maine at Sceaux re-introduced her to Voltaire, famous and forty. Then, with her modish Duchess and Marquis as chaperons, she visited him in his rooms. It took the man but a very little while to recognise in her a kindred passion for that noblest liberty, enlightenment; to see reflected in her his own genius for hard work; to find out that she too was tired of this Paris ‘at once idle and stormy’ and would fain find a life where there should be more of the gods’ best gift—time—to think, to write, to speak one’s message for the benefit of that world which *must* listen at last.

He had soon written her an Epistle on her scientific connection with Maupertuis, as well as that one dated 1733, to the ‘respectable Émilie,’ on Calumny.

By August 14, 1733, he was writing to his dear



Cideville 'You are Émilie in a man and she is Cideville in a woman : ' and a few days later to the Abbé de Sade giving his brilliant first impressions of his Marquise. In November he was writing to Sade again, proudly telling him how Émilie had learnt English in a fortnight.

Then she was with him at Richelieu's wedding. Far from finding the situation embarrassing, she was in heaven, she said—until the fear of Voltaire's arrest, and the news that it would not be safe for him to remain in France made her discover that men were insupportable. 'I shall retire at once to my château,' she added. For her Château of Cirey was on the extreme edge of France; on the borders of Lorraine, and but a stone's throw from safety.

Its position thus decided two destinies.

Of what did Voltaire think as he fled from Montjeu through the pleasant, budding country on those spring days, towards that desolate spot he was to make famous? The Marquise was not with him. She was going to Paris to use her noble name and influence at Versailles to obtain the revocation of that horrible *lettre de cachet*. Voltaire was already her lover; though he was not now, any more than he was hereafter, in love with her. He had a boundless and most generous admiration for her talents—the warmest enthusiasm for her whom he called 'a great man whose only fault was being a woman.' He was indeed as faithful to her person as he was faithful to his belief in her great intellectual gifts. She was for ever his ideal of feminine erudition—'who listens to Virgil, and Tasso, and does not disdain a game of picquet,' 'who understands Newton and loves verses and the wine of Champagne as you do'—the sorceress whose charms worked all their magic on his mind, but never touched his heart.

To be at once a great creative genius and capable of an all-absorbing love passion is given to few men. It was not given to Voltaire. No doubt, as his carriage jolted along the roads under the May sunshine towards quiet, peace, and safety, he honestly supposed himself to be devotedly in love with his 'divine Émilie.' He had chosen her to be the companion of life. Those eight volumes of his letters to her, which were destroyed at her death, were very likely in some sort the letters of a lover; but, arguing from the known to the unknown, they must have been the letters of the lover who worshipped his mistress's scientific acquirements, her passion for knowledge and her matchless intellectual industry, a thousand times more than any qualities of her heart and soul.

By May 23, 1734, Voltaire was at Bâle and writing from there to Madame du Deffand. She, as well as Madame du Châtelet, was doing her best to get him back into ministerial favour. They were of the opinion that the usual disavowal would be the best thing. Very well! 'I will declare that Pascal was always right . . . that all priests are disinterested: that the Jesuits are honest . . . that the Inquisition is the triumph of humanity and tolerance: in fact I will say anything they like, if they will but leave me in peace.' Of course, no one could believe the disavowal. But they could pretend they believed it. Madame du Châtelet worked harder than ever among her influential friends and, when her mind grew easier respecting her lover, continued her lessons from Maupertuis. She spent the summer at Versailles. The government no doubt had never been very anxious to bring back such a troublesome fugitive as Voltaire. The matter dropped.

In June 1734, Voltaire first saw the Château of

Cirey. No one was there when he arrived. The obliging Marquis was with his regiment. He was generally with his regiment when he was not wanted at home. And he was very seldom wanted at home. It was the custom of the day for a fine lady to have a lover. The husband was the last person in the world to object to an arrangement so ordinary. Provided everything was done with a decent respect for the *convenances*—why, then, one might do anything. ‘Modesty has fled from our hearts and taken refuge on our lips’ said Voltaire. The words may stand as the motto of French eighteenth-century morality. It shuddered horror-struck at the ill-bred word and connived gaily at the coarse thing. No one thought the worse of Émilie for her lovers; and rather thought the better of her for keeping them so long. One of Voltaire’s biographers has adduced as an excuse for that ‘Pucelle’ of his that chastity was the peculiar boast of the Church, so that Voltaire, hating the Church, despised chastity too. Perhaps that excuse might serve for his attachment to Madame du Châtelet. But he himself considered that no excuse was needed at all. He was following the usual custom of his age. If the Church objected to immorality it was in theory only. In practice, the abbés who had influenced his boyhood and been the companions of his youth were a thousand times more vicious than he had ever been. That he never showed himself to better advantage than in that position, does not make his long connection with the Marquise less reprehensible. But it remains a fact, that he was loyal and patient when she was shrewish and unreasonable; that he was true to what he knew was no bond, and had long become a bondage: faithful when she was faithless: abundantly generous in



appreciation of her mental gifts: and staunch to her false memory to the end.

Cirey-sur-Blaise is situated in Champagne, to the south of the wine country. It is surrounded by almost impenetrable forests. It lies one hundred and forty bad miles from Paris, four from Vassy, the nearest village, eight from St. Dizier, a little town. It is near Domrémy, the birthplace of Joan of Arc. In 1734 a coach came two or three times a week from Paris, bringing news of the world, some of the necessities and a few of the luxuries of life. The château itself was utterly tumble-down, old, huge, bare and desolate. A chapel adjoined it, and the gardens had long fallen into overgrown neglect. A lady visitor, who came there in 1738, spoke of the place in words which were at least admirably descriptive of her own character, and said it was 'of a desolation shocking to humanity, four miles from any other house, in a country where you can see nothing but mountains and uncultivated land and where you are abandoned by all your friends and hardly ever see anyone from Paris.' The last words denoted the climax of horror in the vulgar little mind of round-about Madame Denis, Voltaire's niece. *She* had not 'the insurance of a just employment' against ennui and melancholy.

The first sight of its solitary beauty may have been delighting her uncle's soul when in Paris his 'English Letters' were being burnt by the hangman and himself denounced by every opprobrious term in the vocabulary of the government. He had been there but a very short time when he heard news of a duel in which the Duke of Richelieu was engaged; and hastened to the camp of Philippsburg near Baden, where he arrived on July 1, 1734. The duel had arisen out of



Richelieu's marriage: so Voltaire, having made that, felt responsible for the duel too. Richelieu was at Philippsburg with his regiment. His injuries were not serious. The camp received Voltaire with so much *éclat* and delight that Madame du Châtelet warned him the French authorities were offended and he returned to Cirey. He had scarcely set foot in its tangled garden before he became a gardener, busily setting it to rights: or looked at the tumbledown château, before he was, in his own words, 'mason and carpenter.' He had never had a home before. What matter if the place were desolate, ruined and forlorn? It was on the borders of safety; it could be repaired, improved, beautified. He fell in love with it, with that impulsive idealism which was always a part of his nature and always at variance with the gay, deadly, careful cynicism of nearly all his writings. He had 'a passion for retirement' he said. He lent the absent Marquis forty thousand francs (at 5 per cent. interest, 'never paid') that the repairs might be set on foot. By August they were well in train, and the house becoming habitable.

Voltaire hunted boar in the forest and exchanged country produce with an amiable neighbour, Madame de la Neuville. He wrote gallant letters to another, the fat and goodnatured Madame de Champbonin, who was to be hereafter a constant visitor at Cirey. He was working of course—at his 'Century of Louis XIV.'—at new plays—at a certain 'Treatise on Metaphysics' and some 'Discourses on Man,' at once light and wise. The glory of summer was on the land. Voltaire was now a man of substance through his shrewdness and economy rather than through his writings. To the money he derived from them he was always

strangely indifferent. For them he was to be paid, not by gold, but by their gigantic influence on the human mind.

On the whole, those first few solitary months at Cirey must have been some of the happiest he knew. The future shone rosy like dawn. Peace, love, and work—there is no better life. That was the life to which Voltaire looked forward now.

In October he spent, for some reason not certain, a few weeks at Brussels: and then returned to Cirey.

In November, there arrived from Paris, laughing and vigorous, not having slept a single wink on the journey, and preceded by mountains of chiffons and books, boxes, pictures, necessities, luxuries and superfluities—Madame du Châtelet.

The extraordinary pair wasted no time at all in sentiment. They turned their energetic attention to the dilapidated house and grounds at once. Madame became ‘architect and gardener.’ She found the secret, with plenty of old china and tapestry to help her, ‘of furnishing Cirey out of nothing.’ Voltaire had valuable pictures to contribute to the general effect. Both workers were so thoroughly practical, so indefatigable, so clever! It was in these early days of happiness that Voltaire wrote a blissful quatrain which was placed over one of the summer-houses in the garden and which may be broadly translated by the quatrain of another poet:—

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

The du Châtelet children, little Pauline of eight and Louis of six (the third had died a baby in the

January of this year, 1734), kept much in the background, were, if anything, an additional charm to the illustrious visitor. He found Louis a *doux* and sensible little boy: discovered him a tutor on one occasion: gave him a silver watch on another: and saved his life, for the guillotine, by dosing him with lemonade when he had smallpox. Pauline, early sent to Joinville, sixteen miles away, to be educated, was frequently recalled therefrom when, a little later, she was wanted to act in the Cirey theatricals, for which, like her mother, she had a pretty talent.

Madame la Marquise did not herself pretend at any time to a great interest in her offspring. When her husband foolishly returned presently from his regiment she wrote to her old lover, Richelieu, that her situation was very embarrassing, 'but love changes all thorns into flowers.' She and Voltaire both spoke of the Marquis as *le bonhomme*. Beyond being a sad bore in conversation and as incapable of appreciating wit in others as he was of originating any himself, he seems to have given no trouble provided he had his meals regularly: and remains for posterity what he was for his contemporaries—a stupid, goodnatured, complacent, slip-slop person whom one could neither much dislike nor at all respect.

When he was at home his wife and her famous guest left him to his sport, his dinner, and his nap, and themselves plunged into work of every kind, but particularly into that intellectual work which was the passion of their lives. It was a strange household in that tumbledown château in the depths of primæval forests—a strange mixture of the laxity and wickedness of the evil Paris of the day and of the highest mental effort and enjoyment—of the meanest



sensual indulgence and the noblest aspirations towards light and liberty—the clear voices of children and the biting and dazzling sarcasms of a Voltaire against those who would keep men in bondage and ignorance, children for ever.

In the December of 1734 Madame du Châtelet went to Paris, taking with her to d'Argental a new tragedy Voltaire had written, called 'Alzire.'

At the end of 1734 Voltaire first makes allusion in his letters to one of the most famous—and certainly the most infamous—of his works, the 'Pucelle.' The idea of it had been suggested at a supper at Richelieu's—Richelieu, equally celebrated for both kinds of gallantry—in 1730. The 'Pucelle' is Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans. Dull Chapelain had spoilt the subject already. It did not occur as a promising one to poet Voltaire. Richelieu and his guests over-persuaded him to try his hand upon it. In a very short time, he was reading aloud to them the first four cantos of that gay masterpiece of indecent satire. How very little he could have guessed then what a plague, danger, torment, solace and delight 'my Jeanne,' as he called her, was to be to him for the rest of his days! He had indeed many other things to think of. 'Jeanne' could only be an interlude to weightier occupations. He turned to her as one man turns to gaming and another to dissipation. She was the self-indulgence of his life, and it must be owned a very pernicious one.

He must have found Cirey's neighbourhood to Domrémy inspiring. By January 1735, eight cantos were complete.

Voltaire received in March the revocation of his *lettre de cachet*—the end for which his friends had used



all their influence. He was told almost in so many words that he might go back to Paris if he would be a good boy. On March 30, 1735, he *did* go back. The capital was always to him the gorgeous siren who fascinated him from far and disillusioned him near. Cantos of that dangerous 'Pucelle' were already flying about the salons. Voltaire busied himself in finding a tutor for little Louis du Châtelet and characteristically engaged that Linant, his unsatisfactory *protégé*—ignorant and indolent—'for fear he should starve'—and trusting to the Marquise's Latin to improve the master's. The Marquis had desired that the tutor should be an abbé. It looked more respectable! But when Voltaire said decisively 'No priests chez les Émilies!' the *bonhomme* contented himself with the stipulation that the youth should have a *penchant* for religion.

One night when in Paris Voltaire supped with the famous Mademoiselle Quinault, actress of the Théâtre Français. She told him how she had seen at a fair a dramatic sketch with a good idea in it—and of which she was going to tell Destouches, the comic playwright. The other playwright listened in silence: but the next morning he brought her the plan of a comedy on the subject and vowed her to secrecy. Not only was the idea not to be divulged, but the very name of the author of the play, which was called 'The Prodigal Son,' was to be a mystery. Theriot knew of course, and one Berger. 'It is necessary to lie like the devil' Voltaire wrote to them, 'not timidly or for a time but boldly and always. Lie, my friends, lie. I will repay you when I can.'

He thought, not wrongly, that if its authorship were known, the play, good, bad, or indifferent, would

be hissed from the stage. 'I made enough enemies by "Œdipe" and the "Henriade"' he said.

He was weary, as he might well be, of quarrels, of dangers, and of jealousies. The visit to Paris was a very flying one. He left there on May 6 or 7. On May 15 he was writing to Theriot from Lunéville, soon to be the Court of Stanislas, ex-King of Poland, and where Voltaire now found a few philosopher friends and the charming and accomplished bride, Madame de Richelieu. He was there but a very short time.

How good it was to see the Cirey forest again—the garden growing daily into order and beauty—balconies and terraces being built here—an avenue planted there—and within, everywhere delightful evidence of Madame's clever touch! He rode about the country on her mare, Hirondelle. He urged on the workmen—and enjoyed doing it. He flung himself with ardour and enthusiasm into small things as into great. He had so many interests and was so much interested in them, no wonder he was happy. There was that idle Linant to spur to industry, and Mesdames de la Neuville and de Champbonin to vary the home party. Cirey was (*Cirey-en-félicité*)—Cireyshire, in memory of that dear England. Émilie was still 'the divine Émilie,' 'the goddess,' the cleverest, the only woman in the world.

In August 1735 Voltaire's play 'The Death of Cæsar,' imitated from (Voltaire thought it an improvement on) the 'Julius Cæsar' of one Shakespeare, was played by the pupils of the Harcourt College on the day of their prize-giving. 'I have abandoned two theatres as too full of cabals' wrote the author gaily, 'that of the Comédie Française and that of the world.' The truth was 'The Death of Cæsar' was unsuited to the stage,

and of what its author called 'a Roman ferocity.' It had no love interest and no female characters.

Voltaire was not a little indignant when the piece appeared in print in Paris—totally unauthorised and shamefully incorrect. 'The editor has massacred Cæsar worse than Brutus and Cassius ever did,' said he. Its appearance was the chief trouble of this autumn of 1735. In its November, Algarotti, the Italian *savant*, and the friend of Prince Frederick of Prussia, came to stay at Cirey. He read aloud his 'Dialogues on Philosophy:' and Voltaire read aloud a canto of the 'Pucelle,' or 'Louis XIV.,' or a tragedy. The rest of the time they laughed over their champagne and studied Newton and Locke. What extraordinary people! The *bonhomme*, if he was there at all, did not count. The Marquise, who, as has been seen, had learnt English in a fortnight, already translated at sight and had her inborn genius for philosophy and science.

The year waned in such studies. Algarotti left. In eighteen months, besides the seventy-five pages of the 'Treatise on Metaphysics' which he had written in answer to Émilie's question as to what she was to think on life, death, God, man, and immortality, Voltaire had also written a comedy—'my American Alzire,' 'my savages'—the three-act tragedy 'The Death of Cæsar,' cantos of the 'Pucelle,' chapters of 'Louis XIV.,' some part of 'The Prodigal Son' and at least four of the rhymed 'Discourses on Man.' His letters of the period which survive, and which only include a single fragment out of the number he must have written to Madame du Châtelet, fill a fourth of a large volume. Add to this that he was personally supervising the building and decorating, that he was the lover of the Marquise—a position that always

occupied a good deal of time with that *exigeante* lady—correcting the incorrigible Linant, busy making all kinds of chemical experiments and collecting old pictures by proxy in Paris, and it will be seen that he was the living proof of his own saying ‘One has time for everything if one chooses to use it.’



## CHAPTER VIII

## A YEAR OF STORMS

AFTER the death of Madame du Châtelet, Longchamp, Voltaire's secretary, rescued from the flames in which many of her papers were burning, a number of letters in a very small handwriting. They were the 'Treatise on Metaphysics.' Voltaire dedicated them to her in a quatrain which is as graceful in the original as it is clumsy in the translation.

He, who wrote these metaphysics  
Which he gives you as your own,  
Should die for them, as a traitor,  
But he dies for you alone.

They were intended only for her eye. They contain the whole Voltairian creed in brief, but in every essential. They were indeed, in the opinion of that day, fit matter for the hangman, and to bring their author to the Bastille.

The title is not alluring, it must be confessed. But the matter has that witchery of style which Voltaire's writings never missed. There is no thinking man but must some time or other have asked himself such questions on God and the soul, free-will, liberty, vice and virtue, as Voltaire here proposes and answers. Like his hero Newton, he knows how to doubt. He passionately seeks truth and pursues that quest even

when he has found the truth is not what he wishes it to be. No man ever made a more clear, logical, and honest statement of his religion, as far as it had then progressed, than Voltaire in the 'Treatise on Metaphysics : ' and no student of his works or character can afford to pass it by.

The 'Discourses on Man' form seven epistles in easy verse : and may be said to be founded on Pope's 'Essay on Man' in much the same way as the ribald 'Pucelle' was founded on the 'Maid of Orleans' of the dull and respectable Chapelain. Their sentiments certainly differ widely from the comfortable optimism and orthodox theology of Mr. Pope. In this work, as in all his others, Voltaire was not so much the enemy of religion, as of *a* religion : and less the foe of Christianity than of that form of it called Roman Catholicism. The Epistles are upon the Nature of Pleasure, the Nature of Man, True Virtue, Liberty, the writer's favourite subjects. They are easy reading—light, graceful, delicate, witty. In brief, they are Voltaire.

On January 27, 1736, was produced in Paris Voltaire's Peruvian comedy 'Alzire.' 'My Americans' he called it usually. It was a brilliant success, and ran for twenty consecutive nights. Voltaire gave all the proceeds to the actors. He had no great opinion of it. 'As for comedy, I will have nothing to do with it : I am only a tragic animal,' said he : and again, 'You must be a good poet to write a good tragedy, a good comedy only requires a certain talent for versemaking.' He was right—with regard to himself at least. His comedies are all sprightly and vivacious but not much else. Between the lines, indeed, even of 'Alzire'—which the author, with a twinkle in his eye, called 'a very Christian piece . . . which should

reconcile me with some of the devout'—may be read the most characteristic of the Voltairian opinions. But he was too true an artist to allow those opinions to override his play, and never forgot to disguise the powder in a great deal of jam. It was twice performed at Court.

He was living quietly at Cirey when it was pleasing the popular taste of Paris. One is not surprised that overtaxed Nature had her revenge at last. By February, he was thoroughly ill. Madame du Châtelet sat on the end of his bed and read aloud Cicero in Latin and Pope in English. They were not wasting their time anyhow! One of them, at least, considered it nothing short of 'a degradation' to allow bodily ill-health to stop mental industry.

In March, he wrote that he was 'overwhelmed by maladies and occupations.' By April, he was well enough to be plunged into a quarrel with the faithless Jore, bookseller of Rouen.

If Voltaire was a very good friend, he was also a very good enemy. A more hot-headed, energetic, pugnacious foe certainly never existed. While he hated, he hated well. He lashed his enemy with such brilliant invective, such delicate gibes, such rollicking sarcasms, that one must needs pity the poor wretch if he deserved his fate ever so fully. Did he get up and retaliate, Voltaire was at him again in a moment, dancing round him, goading him to madness with the daintiest whip flicked with *mots* and jests and little cunning allusions, which looked so innocent, and always caught the victim on the raw. Diatribe, gaiety, quip, mockery,—this man had all the weapons. He never used one where another would have done better. He had a dreadful instinct for finding out the weak place in his



adversary's armour and logic. 'God make my enemies ridiculous!' was one of his few prayers. It was granted in full measure.

But if he was a dangerous and an untiring foe, he was not an ungenerous one. In this case, Jore was certainly the aggressor. He had played Voltaire false in the matter of the 'English Letters.' He had endangered the author's safety and condemned him to exile. He wrote now from the Bastille saying that if Voltaire would avow himself the author of the book, he, Jore, would be released. Voltaire was as quick to compassion as he was quick to anger. If he had hated a pigmy like Jore with a fierceness he should have kept for a worthier foe, the moment the man was fallen, his enemy became his friend. He wrote the letter asked of him, declaring himself to be the writer of the abominable thing. Then Jore demanded fourteen hundred francs, the cost of the confiscated edition. On April 15 Voltaire hurried up to Paris. There he saw Jore, and, though denying that he had any claim upon him, offered him half the sum he had demanded. Jore refused it: brought a lawsuit against Voltaire, and published a defamatory account of him. Voltaire's quick passions were up in arms in a moment. He was as much agog to get at his enemy as a terrier is agog for a rat. He would have shaken the wretched little bookseller in just such a terrier fashion, if he could have got hold of him. But all Voltaire's friends advised compromise with such insistence that he at last yielded. He spent twelve breathless indignant weeks in the capital. He had to pay Jore five hundred francs, in lieu of the fourteen hundred he had demanded. 'I sign my shame' he wrote. But he signed and paid all the same. He returned to Cirey in July sick in



mind and body, baffled, bitter and sore. In a year or two Jore professed penitence, and lived for the rest of his life on a small pension allowed him—by Voltaire.

While he was in Paris, two seats had fallen vacant in the Academy. But what chance could there be of one for the hero of a public scandal, a notorious fire-brand, like Voltaire? Villars and Richelieu did their best for him—in vain.

He professed himself gaily indifferent, and *was* bitterly disappointed. He had to further postpone too the production of his 'Prodigal Son.' He could not give that son, he said, so unpopular a father.

The man needed rest after his battles. He had soon what was far better than rest to one of his vivid temperament—a victory. In August began his correspondence with Prince Frederick of Prussia, afterwards Frederick the Great. It comprises many letters remarkable on both sides, extraordinary on Voltaire's. It lasted for many years—before they met, in the early golden days of an almost lover-like infatuation—and long after they had quarrelled and parted. Voltaire was not the man at any time to be insensible to the honour of being the correspondent of one who was 'almost a king.' He was a great deal too impressionable not to be in some sort the child of his age. In all his glowing dreams of liberty, he never wished royalty abolished—only restrained, enlightened, ennobled. And behold! the means were given him now, himself to show a king the way in which kings should walk—to influence a man who would influence a great people—to teach Europe, by a master to whom it *must* listen, those emancipating truths which were the passion of Voltaire's own soul. What an opportunity! It was

characteristic of the man that he realised and seized it at once.

‘Believe that there have never been any good kings save those who, like you, have begun by teaching themselves, by knowing men, by loving the truth, by hating persecution and superstition. There is no prince who, thus thinking, cannot bring back the golden age to his country. Why do so few sovereigns seek this great good? You know why it is, monseigneur; it is because they all think more of royalty than of humanity.’

These words occur in Voltaire’s very first letter, written August 26, 1736. They are the text of all the others. If there were compliments and flatteries, French grace and *politesse*, and the adulation of the ‘Solomon of the North’ somewhat overdone—those were the inevitable courtly trappings which adorned all letters of the time. The monitor of Solomon, as shown in that very first letter, knew himself to be the monitor; and, for all that exquisite turn of phrase and those pretty eulogies, was going to remain the monitor to the end. The flattery was by no means all humbug either. This royal pupil was the aptest that ever man had. He answered his Voltaire, not unworthily. At five-and-twenty he was himself philosopher and thinker: as great a natural genius as he was a natural barbarian. All learning and cultivation left him as much the one as the other.

The correspondence, once started, went on its way with a will. On Voltaire’s side it was from the first profoundly philosophic. His style was as clear, easy, and lucid when he wrote on the deepest and subtlest problems of free-will and personal identity as when he wrote scandal to Theriot or *bagatelles* to Mademoiselle

Quinault. He wrote on the most abstruse subjects with a limpid simplicity of language, unachieved by any other writer before or since. It is the greatest glory of Voltaire as an author in general, as well as the author of the letters to Frederick the Great, that he made profound truths, common truths, and the knowledge that had been the heritage of a few, the heritage of all.

Madame du Châtelet read the letters, of course, before they were despatched from Cirey. One fills eleven large pages of print and is practically an Essay on Personal Liberty—reasonable enough, said Madame, to bring its author to the stake. Theriot showed Frederick's letters about the salons of Paris: the prudent Voltaire thinking that the correspondence with a king might just as well do him all the good it could, and proclaim to his enemies that *all* temporal powers did not hate and fear him. At Cirey, the royal association certainly gave pleasure at first. Madame was singularly superior to kingly attractions: but Frederick was a thinker as well as a prince, and loved philosophy as she did. She had not begun to look upon him as a rival in her lover's affections. In his very first letter Voltaire had declined an invitation to be his visitor on the score that friends should always be preferred before kings.

The bloom of that summer of 1736 came and went on Cirey. Jore was hardly silenced and by no means forgotten when Voltaire flung aside his princely philosopher, as it were, to reply to a long, scandalous, and very personal attack which bitter old J. B. Rousseau, infuriated by the 'Temple of Taste,' had made upon his rival, in a publication called the 'Bibliothèque Française.' That attack dated from the May of this



year. It was not until September 20 Voltaire decided to answer it. He had been very patient, or had crouched awhile for a surer spring. His answer is a masterpiece of gay and biting satire. 'Rousseau has printed in your journal a long letter on me in which, happily for me, there are only calumnies, and, unfortunately for him, there is no wit. What makes the thing so bad, gentlemen, is that it is entirely his own . . . it is the second time in his life he has had any imagination. He has no success when he is original. . . . As for his verses, I can only wish for the sake of all the honest people he attacks, that he should go on writing in the same style.'

And in answer to Rousseau's insinuations on Voltaire's origin, 'I have a valet who is his near relative and a very honest man. The poor youth begs me every day to pardon his relation's bad verses.'

And in reply to that little story Rousseau had once circulated about Voltaire's profane behaviour at a mass, 'Do you think . . . it sits well on the author of the "Moïsade" to accuse me of having talked in church sixteen years ago? . . . Thank God, that Rousseau is as clumsy as he is hypocritical. Without this counterpoise he would be too dangerous.' The letter finishes by recalling all the humiliating episodes in Rousseau's life he would have most wished forgotten.

From which it will be seen that Voltaire did not scruple to employ his adversaries' weapons—and to use them with a most deadly skill and finish.

On October 10, 1736, a play called 'Britannicus' could not be played at the Théâtre Français in Paris on account of the illness of the principal actress. A new comedy called 'The Prodigal Son' by an anonymous author was therefore produced in its stead,



and performed to a crowded house with enormous success.

It had been acted already by a company beaten up in that desolate neighbourhood of Cirey. Voltaire had written reams of letters about it to Mademoiselle Quinault, filled with rather doubtful jokes—which were apparently, however, to the taste of Mademoiselle and of the period. The 'Prodigal' is in verse and five acts, and perhaps reaches a higher level than most of Voltaire's easy comedies. There were many surmises as to its authorship. Voltaire himself suggested that it was by one Gresset. Before he withdrew the veil of anonymity, 'The Prodigal Son' had been lavishly praised by most of its father's enemies.

He had other pleasures just now, too, besides that success, to distract him from the thoughts of his health which, as usual, 'went to the devil.' 'Émilie, reading Newton, . . . terraces fifty feet wide, balconies, porcelain baths, yellow and silver rooms, niches for Chinese trifles, all that takes a long time,' he wrote to Theriot. Passing travellers too came to Cirey, and told travellers' tales about it when they returned to Paris. In this year, 1736, Voltaire began an immense correspondence with a Parisian agent of his, an Abbé Moussinot, to whom he wrote about investments and speculations, and whom he commissioned to buy tapestries, diamond shoe-buckles, and scrubbing brushes; reflecting telescopes and hair powder; thermometers, barometers, scent, sponges, dusters,—everything in the world. 'If you do not want to commit suicide, always have something to do' was one of his own axioms.

Even now, unfortunately for him, all these varied occupations did not give him so much to do that he could not read, re-read, delight in, and talk about until

it became public property, a certain little *bizarrerie* of his versatile mind called 'Le Mondain.' A gay little piece is the 'Mondain,' three or four pages long, in very flowing verse, a little impertinent, perhaps, and quite volatile and careless. It was written about the same time as 'Alzire.' It contains a flippant allusion to Adam and Eve, and the famous expression 'le superflu, chose très nécessaire.' Those are the most memorable things in it. The most memorable thing about it is the fury of persecution it brought down on the author and the storm of hatred it excited. The offence was supposed to lie in the allusion to our first parents. The real offence was the name and reputation of Voltaire.

On December 21, 1736, he received a warning letter from his friend d'Argental in Paris, telling him that the 'Mondain' rendered its author's position once more unsafe. It is said that the authorities thought of warning the Marquis that he must no longer give refuge to such a firebrand. Voltaire and Madame had a hurried consultation. Madame wept not a little: for though she was a philosopher she was also a woman, and as a woman, and after her capacity, she loved Voltaire. She strongly opposed the idea of his taking refuge with Prince Frederick: but agreed that he must fly across the frontier. She went with him as far as four-mile distant Vassy, and they parted there, with many tears. The man's heart was hot with anger and bitterness. The old serpent of injustice and oppression entered into every Eden he found. Madame only remembered that she loved him and that he must leave her. The strange *convenances* of the day, which permitted so many things, had a few rules, and those few had to be observed rigidly to make up for many laxities.

If the Marquise could have gone with Voltaire to England or Prussia, all would have been well. But that was not permitted. She could neither go with him nor he stay with her. They said good-bye in a bitter cold. It was winter—the winter had come so soon! A few days later there arrived in Brussels, in deep snow, one M. Renol, merchant.

No personal injustice which he ever suffered so deeply affected Voltaire as this one. In some cases if he did not deserve, he at least tempted, the anger of the authorities. But here! 'Is it possible that anyone can have taken the thing seriously?' he wrote. 'It needs the absurdity and denseness of the golden age to find it dangerous, and the cruelty of the age of iron to persecute the author of a *badinage* so innocent.' He went to Antwerp, to Amsterdam, and to Leyden. At Brussels 'Alzire' was performed in his honour—for all that he was travelling *incognito*, and M. Renol, merchant, had no reason to be more interested in 'Alzire' than anybody else. At Leyden crowds flocked to see him, and he was introduced to Boerhaave, the great doctor. He was at Amsterdam in January 1737, received with all honour, 'living as a philosopher,' studying much, working at Newton—as Voltaire alone knew how to work—at any hour of the night and day, passionately, thoroughly, devotedly. He superintended the printing of his 'Elements of Newton's Philosophy' then in the Dutch press. He tried to forget. But he could not. The offence was rank and smelt to heaven. He was abroad until March. Then in answer to the tears and prayers of his Marquise, he gave out he was going to England—and went to Cirey. But for those tears, but for that faith unfaithful which kept him falsely true, he *would* have gone to England as he said. 'If



friendship stronger than all other feelings had not recalled me, I would willingly have spent the rest of my days in a country where at least my enemies could not hurt me : and where caprice, superstition, and the power of a minister need not be feared. . . . I have always told you that if my father, brother, or son were Prime Minister in a despotic state I would leave it to-morrow. But Madame du Châtelet is more to me than father, brother, or son.' She was. She had been not a little sore and wretched while he was away. Prudence had made his letters perforce so cold ! 'He calls me "Madame" !' The overwhelming vigour of her affection brought him back to her. But even *her* entreaties for prudence could not keep him from writing a 'Defence of Le Mondain,' and an answer to the criticisms thereon, called the 'Use of Life.' His heart was hot within him. Fifteen years later the fever burnt still.

'You will say fifteen years have passed since it all happened' he wrote to d'Argental. 'No ! only one day. For great wrongs are always recent wounds.'



## CHAPTER IX

## WORK AT CIREY

THE spring of 1737 passed quietly enough. Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet were occupied in scientific experiments, and as delighted as two children with wonderful discoveries and a dark room. They paid very little heed to the summer which was coming, tender and fragrant, to crown desolate Cirey with loveliness. Nothing was so unfashionable as Nature in the eighteenth century. Even the poets neglected her—save one ploughman in his barren North. To painters she served only as the unheeded background to a trim Watteau shepherdess courting a bashful shepherd on a fan. To Voltaire and his Marquise she hardly formed even a background. In all his writings there is not the slightest evidence that he had so much as a perception of natural beauty. He was fond of pointing out how much better off was a modern, cultivated, luxurious Frenchman, than a happy Adam in some wild Eden, and hereafter was quickly irate, after his fashion, with that absurd theory of Jean Jacques Rousseau's that the 'state of Nature is the reign of God.'

About midsummer there arrived at Cirey on a visit, one Kaiserling, a Prussian, young, gay, delightful, with a pretty talent for making French verses—*tant bien que mal*—and the social ambassador of Prince

Frederick. Kaiserling brought his master's portrait as a present to his master's guide, philosopher, and friend, and the warmest of greetings and messages, besides the second part of somebody's *Metaphysics* and the whole of somebody else's *Dissertations*. He was received, he said, as Adam and Eve received the angel in Milton's garden of Eden, only the hospitality was better and the *fêtes* more gallant. There were plays and conversations. Eve, as Madame du Châtelet, was the easiest and most delightful hostess in the world, who sang to the celestial organ, played the spinet, spoke all languages, and no doubt amused the visitor, if he were not of nervous habit, by driving him about the country in her 'phaeton for fairies drawn by horses as big as elephants.'

In the evenings, if one did not read aloud a canto of that wicked 'Pucelle' or a chapter of 'Louis XIV.,' there were fireworks, the most beautiful fireworks with letters of flame spelling Frederick's name and surrounded by the motto 'To the Hope of the human race.' It is not a little curious to note the naïve delight a Voltaire took to the very end of his days in these, and such, amusements. He had always something of the child in him—the child's love of laughter, the child's love of the gaudy, as well as the child's hot temper, generous impulse, and quickness to forgive. Nothing was so small that he was too great to be amused by it. 'Rire et fais rire' was one of his mottoes. He threw himself into those firework preparations as thoroughly as a very few months later, and after days passed in the most abstruse studies, he devoted himself body and soul to marionettes, charades, and a magic lantern. To say that he was a versatile Frenchman is some explanation: but it is not a sufficient one. He

worked and thought so hard that the more frivolous the recreation, the more it recreated. 'The divinity of gaiety,' Catherine the Great called him. 'If Nature had not made us a little frivolous we should be most wretched' he said himself. 'It is because one can be frivolous that the majority of people do not hang themselves.' It was because Voltaire could always laugh and work that it could be truly said of one of the most impressionable and sensitive of human creatures that 'sixty years of persecution never gave him a single headache.'

After three weeks' stay, Kaiserling left, taking with him to his Prince a part of 'Louis XIV.' and some short poems. They both wanted—and begged—just a few cantos of the 'Pucelle.' But on this point the goddess of Cirey was perfectly firm. 'The friendship with which she honours me does not permit me to risk a thing which might separate me from her for ever,' Voltaire wrote. Entrust King and Kaiserling with a bomb which might explode at any moment and scatter love, liberty, peace, to atoms! Madame was too clever a woman for that. The guest left without his 'Pucelle,' and Émilie and Voltaire plunged deeply again into the scientific studies and experiments which were the particular madness of the hour.

At the end of the year 1737, the lazy Linant, the tutor, was very rightly discharged by Madame du Châtelet. She had extended her kindness to both his mother and sister. But the sister was as unpromising as the brother. They left Cirey. Voltaire said he had given his word of honour not even to write to his former *protégé*; 'but I have not promised not to help him.' Through a mutual friend he was weak and generous enough to send this 'enfant terrible,' as Diderot



called him, fifty livres: and hereafter took no little pride and interest in Linant's third-rate writings.

There are some very characteristic letters of Voltaire's written at this period in which he economically tries to arrange, through Moussinot, for the engagement of a young priest, who is also to be something of a chemist, so that he can say mass in the Cirey chapel on Sundays and Saints' days and devote himself to the laboratory all the others. This *factotum* did not turn out a success, and a separate young man had to be engaged for each occupation.

In the November of 1737 died M. Mignot, the husband of Voltaire's dead sister Catherine. M. Mignot left behind two slenderly portioned and unmarried daughters—and behold! the versatile Voltaire in the part of the paternal uncle, seeking them husbands and furnishing them with *dots*. He wanted Louise, the elder, to marry the son of his Cirey neighbour, the stout, goodnatured Madame de Champbonin. But Louise, who was a bouncing young woman of four-and-twenty, with a pronounced love of pleasure and the sound of her own voice, entirely declined to be buried alive for the rest of her life in an impossible country neighbourhood: and expressed these sentiments quite distinctly to Uncle Voltaire. In practice, as well as principle, he was for freedom of action. In his day, the father, or the person who stood in place of the father to a marriageable girl, disposed of her literally without consulting her, and exactly as it seemed best to himself.

'They are the only family I have,' Voltaire wrote of his nieces rather sadly. 'I should like to become fond of them. . . . If they marry *bourgeois* of Paris I am their very humble servant, but they are lost



to me.' But he had said too that to restrict the liberty of a fellow creature was a sin against nature. So on February 25, 1738, Louise Mignot married a M. Denis, who was in the Commissariat Department in Paris, and received from Uncle Voltaire a wedding present of thirty thousand francs.

In March the young couple came to spend part of their honeymoon at Cirey. It has already been said that Madame Denis found the country horribly, abominably, and dismally dull. There was a theatre, to be sure! But where was one to find actors in this desert? The bride had to put up with a puppet show, which, indeed, was very good, she added grudgingly. They were received in 'perfect style' too. That must have been comforting to the soul of a Madame Denis. Uncle Voltaire was building 'a handsome addition to the château'—also comforting perhaps to the Denisian temperament. The bride added naïvely that her uncle was very fond indeed of M. Denis, 'which does not astonish me, for he is very amiable.'

But what an eerie enchanted castle it was amid these tangled forests of Champagne! Its sorceress—pretty and charming as well as clever, niece Denis found her—brewed every potion that could keep a lover, humoured his whims, dressed for him, sang to him, decorated the house to his fancy and—strange love-philtre!—quoted him 'whole passages of the best philosophers.' The captive was an unconscious captive, but a captive still. The chains were gold, but there were chains. And even gold chains chafe and bruise and eat into the flesh at last. The commonplace niece saw much to which the brilliant Madame and her Voltaire were both as yet blind. She loudly regretted that her uncle should be lost to his friends and

bound hand and foot by such an attachment. Voltaire and Émilie parted from the bride and bridegroom, it may be assumed, pretty cheerfully. They were not only still happy in each other. They had a prodigious amount of work to get through. And your idle people, not content with doing nothing themselves, are the surest prevention of work in others and grudge the industry they will by no means imitate.

In the June of 1738, the second Mademoiselle Mignot was married to a M. de Fontaine. Voltaire did his duty and gave the bride twenty-five thousand francs: but he hated weddings and was not to be persuaded to go to this one, any more than to Madame Denis'.

Lazy, goodnatured Theriot came to stay at Cirey in October, and no doubt did *his* idle best to wean his indefatigable host from the scientific labours to which he was devoted, soul and body. The Cirey goddess did not care about M. Theriot. If she was not married to Voltaire she was at least wifely in her failings, and not at all too disposed to like her lover's old friends. Voltaire went into the parting guest's bedchamber, and under pretence of helping him to pack, slipped into his box fifty louis. He was a man of substance by now. It is estimated that at this period his income must have been about three thousand pounds per annum (English money). Few men who have made wealth as hardly and thriftily as he did, and are of temperament naturally shrewd and prudent, have been as generous with it when made. Voltaire was not only fully alive to the claims of his relatives and to the needs of his friends, but had a strangely soft spot in his cynic heart for anyone who was forlorn and poor. It was in 1737 he had written

to Moussinot, to go, from him, to a certain Demoiselle d'Amfreville and, for no better reason than that she was needy and had once had 'a sort of estate' near Cirey, 'beg her to accept the loan of ten pistoles, and when she wants more, I have the honour to be at her service.'

Ever since Voltaire returned from England he had been the most enthusiastic hero-worshipper of the great Newton and the great Newtonian system. In England, he had talked with Clarke, the dead Newton's successor and friend. The year following his arrival at Cirey he had devoted himself to science as only a Voltaire understood devotion. At his side was the woman who was the aptest pupil of Maupertuis and almost the only other person in France who understood Newtonianism, save Maupertuis himself, Voltaire, and one Clairaut. The rest of the world was Cartesian. The philosophy of Descartes was *de rigueur*. Fontenelle's 'Plurality of Worlds,' which clothed that philosophy with all the grace and charms of a perfect style, was on the toilet table of every woman of fashion. The government said Descartes was infallible, so he *must* be infallible. With what a passion of zeal those two people set themselves to seek truth for truth's sake—to seek truth whether it agreed with the fashionable belief and the text-books or whether it did not—to find it, and to give it to the world! To make Newton intelligible to the French people—to present his theories so that they would read as delightfully as a romance—to teach his countrymen to think boldly as Newton had thought—to weigh, to ponder, and consider whether the popular faiths were the true faiths—to believe intelligently or to deny, not afraid—that was Voltaire's aim. 'Nothing enfranchises like education.'



‘When once a nation begins to think, it is impossible to stop it.’ The French were to be taught to think by the ‘Elements of Newton’s Philosophy.’ The censor prohibited the work with its dangerous and terrible anti-Cartesian theories when it appeared. But in ten years’ time, the Cartesian theories were proscribed in the schools of Paris and the Newtonian taught everywhere in their stead. Voltaire hardly ever won a finer victory.

In 1735 there had begun, then, to arrive by that bi-weekly coach from Paris air-pumps, crucibles, prisms, compasses, almost every kind of scientific appliance then known. One day the coach brought a practical young chemist (not a priest)—also purchased by the useful Moussinot. Voltaire and Madame were by no means going to be content with reading of Newton’s experiments. They must try them themselves! One day, with a good deal of outside help, it may be presumed, they weighed a ton of red-hot iron. The dark room gave an almost childish pleasure to them both. Voltaire tried experiments of his own. He was so absorbed in them that he neglected his correspondence even. For the time being he was the most scientific scientist who ever breathed—in a fever of interest in his work, agog to know more, for more time, more power to labour, longing for a body that never wanted sleep or rest, change or refreshment. ‘How will you be the better,’ a friend inquired of him, ‘for knowing the pathway of light and the gravitation of Saturn?’ It was a stupid question, to be sure, to ask a Voltaire. All knowledge was a priceless gain, he thought. We must open our souls to all the arts, all the sciences, all the feelings! Poetry, physics, history, geometry, the drama—everything. What!



to miss knowing what one might have known! to have a mind only ready for one kind of learning, when it had room in it, if properly arranged, for every kind! Friend Cideville had mistaken his man.

The Marquise was no whit less enthusiastic. Voltaire's own mathematical education had been neglected. But not hers. The pupil of Maupertuis could help out her lover's defects. *Metaphysics* were her passion. She had the accuracy of Euclid, Voltaire said, and algebra was her amusement. In his dedicatory Epistle to the 'Elements,' which were the fruit of their joint labour, he spoke of her in terms which were at once high-flown compliment and hard fact. She *had* penetrated 'the depths of transcendent geometry' and 'alone among us has read and commented on the great Newton.' She *had* 'made her own by indefatigable labour, truths which would intimidate most men,' and had 'sounded the depths in her hours of leisure of what the profoundest philosophers study unremittingly.' She had corrected many faults in the Italian 'Newtonianism for Ladies' written by their visitor Algarotti, and knew a great deal more about the subject than he did himself. It is not hard to understand how Voltaire came by what he called his 'little system'—that women are as clever as men, only more amiable. He had Madame du Châtelet always with him—Madame whose whole aim in life then was to work, and to please him. Her industry was as great as his own. The word 'trouble' was never in her vocabulary. He loved her intellect if he did not love her. They should have been happy. If they ever were, it was over the 'Elements of Newton's Philosophy.'

The book was ready at last. To make the theory of

gravitation clear—and entertaining—had been Voltaire's chief difficulty. If any man was adapted to enlighten obscurity, he was that man. His own mind was not only extraordinarily brilliant, but it was extraordinarily neat. In the 'Elements' sequence follows sequence, and effect, cause, as incisively as in a proposition of Euclid.

It has been seen that while Voltaire was in Holland in the spring of 1737, he was superintending the printing of these 'Elements.' Before forwarding the last chapters to the printers he sent the whole book for the inspection of the Chancellor of France, full of hope. 'The most imbecile fanatic, the most envenomed hypocrite can find nothing in it to object to' he wrote in his vigorous fashion. Six months passed, and no answer. And then the French authorities sent a refusal. 'It is dangerous to be right in things in which those in power are wrong' wrote Voltaire. Very dangerous. And how unmannerly of this presumptuous Voltaire to dare to treat the beloved Descartes with cool logic and relentless scrutiny just as if he were not sealed, signed, and stamped by the infallible decree of fashion!

But, though it was not permitted, as Voltaire said, to a poor Frenchman to say that attraction is possible and proved, and vacuum demonstrated, yet, as usual, the pirate publishers would by no means miss their chance.

The printers of Amsterdam produced an edition of the work which they called the 'Elements of Newton's Philosophy Adapted to Every Capacity,' (*Mis à la Portée de Tout le Monde*). Of course there was not wanting to Voltaire an enemy to say the title should have been written *Mis à la Porte de Tout le Monde*—shown the door by everybody. The author raged

and fumed not a little over the printers' blunders and incorrectness.

The usual host of calumnies attacked him again. Society and the gutter press united in feeling that a person who dared to doubt their darling Cartesian system *must* be of shameful birth and the most abandoned morals. They insulted him with all 'the intrepidity of ignorance.' He was accused of intrigues with persons he had never seen or who had never existed. The vile license of that strictly licensed press is the finest argument for a free press to be found: the freest is less scurrilous than those much watched and prohibited journals of old France.

Not the less, the storm which heralded its birth thundered the 'Elements of Newton's Philosophy' into fame. It is forbidden: so we *must* read it! If Fontenelle had made the system of Descartes intelligible, Voltaire made the system of Newton amusing. In 1741 he brought out an authorised edition. In ten years, as has been said, there were hardly so many Cartesians in France.

To this same year 1738 belongs a Prize Essay which Voltaire wrote for the Academy of Sciences on the 'Nature and Propagation of Fire.' There were plenty of foundries near Cirey, where he could make practical observations on the subject. So he went and observed. Time? The man had on his hands, to be sure, a lawsuit, a tragedy, a history, an enormous correspondence, a 'Pucelle,' a love affair, an estate, and a couple of chattering lady visitors who had to be amused in the evenings with music, with readings, and charades. He had nearly finished writing the essay when Madame du Châtelet, whose opinions differed from his, and who always had the courage



of them, must needs write, in secret, a rival essay on the same subject.

She began to work on it but a month before it had to be sent in. She could only write at night, since Voltaire did not know she was doing it. Her husband—strange confidant!—was the only person in the secret. For eight nights, she only slept one hour in each. Every now and then she thrust her hands into iced water to refresh herself, and paced her room rapidly. The idea possessed her. ‘I combated almost all Voltaire’s ideas’ she said herself.

He once very happily defined their connection as ‘an unalterable friendship and a taste for study.’ It *was* friendship and would have been happier for both if no softer feeling had entered it. They were friends who could intellectually differ and be friends still: who never sacrificed truth to sentiment, and whose bond of union was not a passion for each other, but for knowledge.

Each of the pair sent in their efforts. Madame’s was chiefly remarkable for the statement that different coloured rays do not give an equal degree of heat: since proved indisputably correct by repeated experiments. Voltaire’s paper, as well as Émilie’s, contained many new ideas. That of itself was sufficient to disqualify their efforts for the prize. It did do so. It was divided between three other competitors, who were correctly orthodox and anti-Newtonian.

Then Madame told her secret, and Voltaire wrote a favourable anonymous review of that essay which contradicted his own, and should have made Madame du Châtelet famous in a better way than as his mistress.

Both of them were as disappointed as two children



might have been at their failure. 'Our Essays really *were* the best!' they wrote and told Maupertuis, almost in so many words. They were: although neither of them is now worth much as science. Some of their theories have been superseded; or proved absolutely wrong. But they were wise for their age, and brilliantly expressed. That may be said, but not much more than that, for all Voltaire's scientific works. They were the alphabet of the language—to teach a scientific childhood to think for itself. It is because they accomplished that aim to the full that they are forgotten to-day.

## CHAPTER X

## PLEASURE AT CIREY

ON December 4, 1738, there arrived at Cirey, having been almost upset out of her post-chaise, and actually compelled to wade through the midwinter mud of the worst roads in France, a visitor, Madame de Graffigny.

Fat and forty was Madame : a vulgar, cheerful, gossiping old nurse : already an ardent hero-worshipper of Voltaire, whom she had met at Lunéville, and with something of literary taste on her own account. The Graffigny had, in fact, caught that eighteenth-century epidemic which showed itself in easy wit, easy writing, and easy morals. She had a brute of a husband from whom she had just obtained a divorce. She had no money. She had any number of friends. Voltaire seems to have liked her because she was poor, good-natured, and adored him. He came to meet his guest in her room when she arrived at two o'clock on that December morning, with a flat candlestick in his hand, and looking for all the world, said the effusive lady, like a monk. Émilie was there too. Her greetings were only a shade less warm than her lover's. Madame de Graffigny was left alone : so that she could then and there sit down to her writing-table and for the benefit of a dear confidant, called Panpan, ring up the curtain on one of the most intimate and minute of domestic comedies ever given to the public.

Some years later Madame de Graffigny obtained some contemporary celebrity by her 'Letters of a Peruvian.' They are altogether forgotten. But her 'Vie Privée de Voltaire et de Madame du Châtelet' will live as long as the fame of that strange pair and the popularity of gossiping memoirs.

Since their arrival there in 1734 both Voltaire and Émilie had been busy in improving, not only the outside, but the inside of their thirteenth-century château. Voltaire had a little wing to himself which, by the irony of fate or choice, adjoined the chapel. He could open his bedroom door and sacrifice to the *convenances* by seeing mass performed, while he went on with his own occupations. Sometimes the visitors fulfilled their religious duties in this way too. They were all very particular not to miss the attendance on Sundays and fête days. Their religion was a concession to social laws, like powdering the hair. When Voltaire was ill in bed, which was pretty often, he had his door opened so that he could hear the penitential litanies being recited, and had a screen drawn round him to exclude draughts. His rooms were very simply furnished, for use not show, spotlessly clean, so that you could kiss the floor, said Madame de Graffigny, in the enthusiastic hyperbole of her early letters. There was very little tapestry and a good deal of panelling which formed an admirable background to a few good pictures. There was a small hall, where the guests took their morning coffee sometimes, where a stove made the air like spring, and where there were books and scientific apparatus, a single sofa and no luxurious armchairs at all. The dark room—still unfinished—led out of the hall, and there was a door into the garden.

The Goddess's apartments were far more gorgeous.

The lady-visitor went into ecstasies over that bedroom and boudoir upholstered in pale blue and yellow—even to the basket for the dog—the pictures by Watteau and the fireplace by Martin, the window looking on the terrace, and the amber writing-case, a present from the politic Prince Frederick.

The rest of the castle was ill-cared for enough, she said. The thirty-six fires which blazed in it daily could not keep it warm. In her own room, in spite of a fire ‘like the fire of Troy,’ she sat and shivered. On Christmas Eve the draught from the windows blew out the candles—although the visitor had solemnly vowed those draughts should be stopped with canvas bags ‘if God gives me life.’ It may not unfairly be surmised that most of the guests suffered as she did. Voltaire was a very good host—hospitable, kind, warmhearted, very anxious they should not be bored, and indefatigable in amusing them with entertainments in the evenings and talking to them at meals. But their comfort in their rooms was naturally not his province. He did not think of it, and Émilie did not care. She did not object to visitors so long as they left her plenty of time and solitude to work: and then was ready enough to be charming in the evenings. Experimental science and good housekeeping are not necessarily incompatible: but each must have its own hours. Science had all Madame du Châtelet’s. She seems to have been the sort of mistress who provided a liberal table for her friends because it is much less trouble to be liberal than economical, and had occasional fits of frugality which took the form of feeding her servants very meanly. She was sublimely inconsiderate towards them, as she was, in a lesser degree, inconsiderate towards her own friends. She was of her age! The *noblesse*



of that time treated their dependents exactly as if they were animals, and animals who were at once dumb, deaf, blind, and stupid. Behind their masters' chairs, the valets listened to theories on which the masters talked and the servants acted. Longchamp, who was later half secretary, half valet to Voltaire, and before that in Madame du Châtelet's service, has left on record how he assisted at her toilet as if he had been her maid. For her, he was not a human creature but a thing—not a man, but a machine.

When Madame de Graffigny arrived she found two fellow visitors also at Cirey—Madame de Champbonin, Voltaire's near neighbour and distant relative, and her son. Madame de Champbonin was variously and elegantly known as the 'fat lady' or the 'great tom-cat.' Voltaire made her in some sort a confidante. Perhaps the stout placidity of her disposition was restful after the tumultuous emotions of the 'effervescent Émilie.' The son was employed as Émilie's amanuensis, and copied for hours and hours manuscripts of which he did not understand a single word. The two lady visitors seem to have walked about the castle a good deal and admired its beauties, sympathised with each other concerning the draughts and the hostess's sublime indifference to such trifles, and hugged themselves with delight at the thought that half France was dying to be in their position as guests at Cirey. To be sure, there were drawbacks even in this earthly Paradise: but half France did not know that, and the daily journal addressed to Panpan was still rapturous.

Presently the Abbé de Breteuil, Madame du Châtelet's brother, also came to stay. He was *grand vicaire* at Sens. He was in every sense a typical abbé of the

period—not much pretending to believe in the religion he professed—with a pronounced taste for broad stories—and ‘assez bon conteur’ himself. The connection between his sister and Voltaire seemed to him only a thing to be proud of. He had countenanced it by his presence here before. The Marquis countenanced it too. Why should anyone else be particular? The abbé had come to enjoy himself, and he did.

While he was there the day began with coffee in Voltaire’s hall between 10.30 and 11.30. Even Madame du Châtelet seems to have roused herself dimly to the sense that she had visitors and that something might be expected of her in the way of entertaining them. Both she and Voltaire tore themselves away a little oftener and for a little longer time from their beloved Newton, during Breteuil’s visit. Everybody stayed with them in the hall till noon, when the Marquis and the two Champbonins went off to their *déjeuner*. The Marquis was always threatening to go to Brussels to see about an endless lawsuit he was concerned in there, and putting off his departure; which was a pity, as no one wanted him. After coffee, Voltaire, the abbé, Émilie, and Madame de Graffigny talked on all things in heaven and earth for a while, and then separated.

The Marquise drove her great horses in her *calèche* sometimes in the morning. Once she would have insisted on nervous Madame de Graffigny going with her, but Voltaire interfered and said people must be happy in their own way. So Émilie, who had herself no time for nerves, went out alone.

Sometimes the party met again for *goûter* at four—sometimes not till the nine o’clock supper. That was the appointed hour for relaxation. Who would not

have been of those evenings? Voltaire was inimitably gay, brilliant, and amusing. Madame de Graffigny had him on one side of her, and that pitiless bore, the unfortunate Marquis, on the other. *He* said nothing, fell asleep, and 'went out with the tray.'

The supper was elegant and sufficient, without being profuse. Voltaire had his valet always behind his chair to look after him, besides two other lackeys also in attendance. Émilie was geometrical no more. She was a woman of the world, trained in the first Court in Europe, witty, easy, charming, delightful. The stories had been broad at previous suppers; but they were broader than ever now, for the especial benefit of Breteuil. He told some of the same kind himself which entertained everybody immensely and which Madame de Graffigny, who had laughed at them fit 'to split her spleen,' retailed for Panpan's benefit the next day. The company drank Rhine wine or champagne which loosened their tongues and brightened their wits, though they were a temperate little gathering, by nature as well as from prudence. Voltaire improvised verses over the dessert, or read something aloud, or quoted from memory. The bare mention of J. B. Rousseau or Jore or any other enemy drew from him a quick torrent of vivacious indignation. One night, after dessert and the perfume handed after the dessert, there was a magic lantern. Voltaire showed it with '*propos* to make you die of laughing' said Madame de Graffigny. Another night there were charades. A third, there was a reading of the 'Mondain.' A fourth, the entire party migrated to the bathroom—an exquisite room with porcelain tiles, marble pavement, pictures, engravings and *bric-à-brac*—where Voltaire read aloud a canto of the 'Pucelle.' Panpan's correspondent



avowedly enjoyed *that* immensely. So did everyone else. To hear something really shocking and dangerous read aloud in a bathroom with closed doors—how *piquant*! Madame de Graffigny gave Panpan epitomes of the cantos she heard, and lived to wish she had not. After the cantos they amused themselves by making punch.

Another evening they rehearsed 'The Prodigal Son' and a farce Voltaire had written, 'Boursouffle.' Private theatricals were one of the Cirey manias. The little theatre was reopened for Breteuil's benefit. Pauline du Châtelet of twelve was interrupted in her education at Joinville to play the part of 'Marthe' which she learnt in the post-chaise coming home. One night they danced in the theatre. Another, Voltaire read one of the 'Discourses on Man.' Yet another they discussed Newtonianism. Once, Voltaire showed them the scientific apparatus—which still stood in the hall awaiting the completion of the dark room—and they looked at globes and through telescopes. Twice he read his new play 'Mérope' to them, and on the second occasion the effusive Graffigny 'wept to sobs.' She had also told them her own melancholy family history, when it had been Voltaire's turn to weep, and Madame du Châtelet was unable to pursue her geometrical studies for the evening.

Breteuil did not stay more than a week or so in all. The fun had been fast and furious while it lasted. It may be surmised that Voltaire and Émilie were not sorry to relax their efforts to keep the social ball rolling. They plunged deeper than ever into hard work. Madame worked all day as well as all night—and never left her room except for the morning coffee and the evening supper. Voltaire often could not tear himself from his



desk until that supper was half over : and directly it was finished could hardly be prevented from returning to his writing. He did his best—he had the true French *politesse* all his life long—to talk and tell stories and amuse his guests ; but his thoughts were far away. He was shut up in his own room the whole day too, now, except for a few minutes when he called on his two lady guests. He would not even sit down. ‘The time people waste in talking is frightful’ he said on one of these brief visits. ‘One should not lose a minute. The greatest waste possible is waste of time.’ The Graffigny was thrown on the stout lady for all companionship, and was in the melancholy position of the person who has to pretend she likes quiet, solitude, and reflection, and does not. After a very little while her graphic and garrulous pen goes much less easily and gaily over the paper.

Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet had troubles of which their guest did not know the cause, but of which she felt the effect. The Christmas Day of 1738 was one of the darkest of both their lives. To be unhappy is seldom to be very amiable. This Graffigny too was, on her own showing, something of a fool. Voltaire and Madame lived in a Paradise about which a serpent, called the French authorities, was for ever lurking, ready to spoil. Voltaire was always writing something he should not have written. And Madame de Graffigny was always writing those voluminous, gushing, confidential, imprudent epistles to Panpan. What *did* she say in them ? On December 29, 1738, a tempest which had long been gathering in petty mistrusts, small jealousies, opened or kept back letters, suspicions, fears, hatreds—burst in a clap of thunder. There was a constrained and silent supper. Then Voltaire came

to Madame de Graffigny's rooms and accused her of having betrayed his trust and endangered his safety by having copied cantos of the 'Pucelle' and sent them to Panpan. The Graffigny denied the accusation *in toto*. Voltaire, beside himself with fury, made her sit down and write and ask Panpan and Desmarets, her lover, both for the original canto she had sent and the copies which had been made of it. The unfortunate lady entirely lost her head. Then enter Madame du Châtelet in a rage royal, beside which Voltaire's was calmness, temperance, and reason. She produced a certain letter from her pocket as a proof of infamy and flung it, very nearly literally, in her guest's face. She accused her of having stolen a canto of the 'Pucelle' from her desk. She reminded her that she had never liked her, and had only invited her to Cirey because she had nowhere else to go. The Graffigny was a monster, the most *indigne* of creatures—all the opprobrious things in the du Châtelet dictionary, which was a very full one. Voltaire put his arm round his furious mistress and dragged her away at last. The quarrel was so loud that the Graffigny's maid, two rooms off, heard every word of it. Madame de Champbonin came in, in the middle, but very prudently retired at once. When Madame de Graffigny was calm enough to read the letter which Émilie had flung at her, she discovered it was one of Panpan's which Émilie had intercepted and read and wherein was the remark 'The canto of "Jeanne" is charming.' The Graffigny was able to explain to Voltaire in a very few words that this sentence referred to her description of the pleasure one of those readings of the 'Pucelle' had given to herself, and that there had been no question of stealing, copying, and sending a canto to anybody in the world.

Cannot one fancy how that little, sensitive, *vif*, angry Voltaire was on his knees to his offended guest at once, begging her a thousand pardons, kissing her hands, apologising, furious with Émilie and ashamed of himself? It was already five o'clock in the morning. But Émilie was recalled not the less (*Megæra*, poor Graffigny named her now). Voltaire argued long with her, in English, to bring her to reason, and was so far successful that the next day she coldly apologised to her guest. She was too much in the wrong to forgive easily or thoroughly. As for Voltaire, *he* asked pardon again and again with tears in his eyes. He could not do too much to make up for his suspicions and mistake. Émilie was diabolically cold and haughty. The unfortunate visitor was 'in hell' she said. But she had no money and nowhere to go to. There were silent uncomfortable suppers. Voltaire's 'pathetic' excuses and nervous anxiety for her comfort and well-being, when he came to see her in her rooms, did not make her position much easier.

After waiting three weeks Madame de Graffigny obtained confirmation of her story from Desmarets and Panpan.

Émilie at last relented so far as to give her guest the very doubtful pleasure of driving her out in that *calèche* of hers: and talking to her more freely and amicably. But though such wounds as Madame de Graffigny had received may heal, the scars remain for ever.

On January 12, 1739, the mathematical Maupertuis, Madame du Châtelet's tutor, came to stay a few days. The unlucky Graffigny suffered a good deal from her eyes about this time, and stayed much in her room. Voltaire himself was in wretched health; so there was no play-acting. Madame de Champbonin left for Paris



on a mission of whose nature the Graffigny was ignorant. On January 18 the Marquis du Châtelet went to Seineville bearing with him many letters and messages for dear Panpan. Early in the next month Desmarets, the lover of Madame de Graffigny, came to stay and Cirey roused itself to another burst of gaiety. It acted 'Zaire' and 'The Prodigal Son' and a play called 'The Spirit of Contradiction.' One rehearsal lasted till three o'clock in the morning. Once the party spent the whole day in Émilie's room where she was 'in bed without being ill.' The next, she was singing to the clavecin, accompanying herself. Another, she sang through a whole opera after supper. She and Desmarets went out riding. In one twenty-four hours the company had rehearsed and played thirty-three acts of tragedies, operas, and comedies. Desmarets read Panpan's letters to the Graffigny while she was at her toilette, as she had no time herself. Desmarets was 'transported, intoxicated'—enjoying himself immensely.

His mistress may be presumed to have been more unhappy than ever, since the first thing he had done on his arrival at Cirey was to tell her he no longer felt for her the feelings of a lover. He went away.

About the middle of February 1739 Madame de Graffigny herself left Cirey having been there less than three months—not six, as the title-page of her book declares. For the rest of her life Voltaire was one of the most staunch and generous friends she had in the world.

Nothing in Madame de Graffigny's 'Vie Privée de Voltaire et de Madame du Châtelet' is so interesting as the light she throws on their relationship to each



other. The golden chains had begun to eat into the flesh. Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, like lesser persons, had to pay the inexorable penalty of a breach of moral law. 'Wrong committed—suffering insured.' Their punishment was the severest of all—it came, not from outward circumstances, but from themselves. The very relationship which had been a sin and a delight, was now at once sin and torment. The gods are just.

The visitor was not long in discovering clouds in the blue heavens of Voltaire's 'Cirey-en-félicité.' There was the 'eternal cackle' of Émilie's tongue, and her sublime indifference to trifles like the hours of meals. Did not she love power too? Not only to have power but, womanlike, to show she had it. One day her lover's coat does not please her. He shall change it! He agrees—for peace, one may suppose, since the coat is good enough and he does not wish to catch cold by putting on another—and his valet is sent for; but cannot be found. Let the matter rest! Not Madame. She persists. They quarrel with a great deal of vivacity, in English. They always quarrel in English. Voltaire goes out of the room in a rage, and sends word to say he has the colic. They are very like two children. Presently they are reconciled—also in English and tenderly. 'Mais elle lui rend la vie un peu dure.'

Another time the quarrel is about a glass of Rhine wine. Rhine wine disagrees with this imprudent Voltaire! The imprudent Voltaire, is, not to put too fine a point upon it, very much out of temper with Émilie's interference in the matter. And it takes the united and warmest persuasions of Breteuil and

Graffigny to make him read 'Jeanne' after supper as he has promised.

At one of the readings of 'Mérope,' Madame du Châtelet, with her abominably clever tongue, turns it into ridicule and laughs at it. She knows her vain and sensitive Voltaire's tender places, it seems, and for the life of her cannot help putting her finger on them just to see if he will wince. He always winces. He will not speak all supper time. After supper it is the nymph's turn to be cross, and Voltaire shows the visitors his globes while she sits sulking in a chair, pretending to be asleep.

What an old, old story it is! What a weary, dull, aggravating old story! and what a happy world it might still be if all the miseries men carefully manufacture for themselves were taken out of it!

Yet another day, and there is a very bitter quarrel about some verses. Émilie says she has written them. Voltaire does not believe it. They both lose their tempers, and it is even said Voltaire takes a knife from the table and threatens her with it, crying, 'Do not look at me with your squinting, haggard eyes!' Perhaps the story is exaggerated. It is to be hoped so. Madame de Graffigny speaks too of Voltaire's wretched health; of his system of doctoring and starving himself; of his disposition at once kind, nervous, and petulant. He told her one day, she says, that Émilie was a terrible woman who had no '*flexibilité dans le cœur*' although that heart was good. The Graffigny adds on her own account that it was not possible to be more 'spied' than Voltaire was, or to have less liberty. It must indeed be remembered that the Graffigny was speaking of a woman of whose superior powers she was always jealous, and whom she had learnt to hate.

Émilie had at least one great good quality: she never abused other women behind their backs.

It has been said that lovers' quarrels are but the renewal of love. There was never a falser word. Every quarrel is a blot on a fair page: forgiveness may erase it, but, at the best, the mark of the erasure is there for ever and the page wears thin. Perhaps Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet acted on the dangerous assumption that, since they could be reconciled to-morrow, it was no matter if they quarrelled to-day.

Their attachment had now lasted not quite five years. It lingered nearly another ten. Every day Émilie drew the cords by which her lover was bound to her tighter—and a little tighter still: until that dramatic moment when she cut them for ever. As for Voltaire, he still warmly admired her genius; wrote her verses; forgave her temper, and held himself unalterably hers.

The life at Cirey—already the subject of a burlesque in Paris—was not what he had dreamed it might be. He was himself hasty, capricious, not easy to live with. But he was also most generous, most affectionate, and most forgiving. And faithful to the end.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE AFFAIR DESFONTAINES

IN 1724 when Voltaire was thirty years old and in Paris, Theriot had introduced to him one Desfontaines, then a journalist, and an ex-abbé. Their acquaintance was of the slightest. It had lasted only a few weeks when Desfontaines was accused of an abominable crime (then punished by burning), arrested, and cast into the Bicêtre. The impulsive Voltaire must needs get up off a sick bed, travel to Fontainebleau, and throw himself at the feet of the influential Madame de Prie and obtain Desfontaines' discharge—on the sole condition that he should not live in Paris. Not content with this good office, he obtained from his friend Madame de Bernières the permission for Desfontaines to reside on her estates. Finally, he procured the revocation of the edict of banishment. Desfontaines could live in Paris and pursue his calling as before. All this for a man he hardly knew, who was an ex-priest, and a very bad writer, if not a very bad man. It was generous, unnecessary, and imprudent. In brief, it was Voltaire.

He might have expected gratitude. He did expect it. Desfontaines wrote him a letter of warm thanks. Eleven years later he was scoffing in a weekly Parisian paper at Newtonianism, as revealed to the French in



Voltaire's 'English Letters.' Then he must translate the 'Essay on Epic Poetry,' which Voltaire had written in English, into French, very badly, so that the tireless author felt the necessity of re-translating it himself. Then, forsooth, M. l'Abbé must damn with faint praise 'Charles XII.' and the 'Henriade.' Even a sensitive Voltaire could only laugh at bites from such a miserable gnat. 'I am sorry I saved him' he wrote lightly in 1735. 'It is better to burn a priest than to bore the public. If I had left him to roast I should have spared the world many imbecilities.' But even a gnat may hurt if it sting often and long enough. The early bliss of Cirey was disturbed by that petty malice. Now in one way, now in another, Desfontaines showed the truth of the shrewd saying that the offender never pardons. The gnat bites grew feverish and swollen. Voltaire had reason to believe, though he still found it hard to believe, that Desfontaines was in league with those other enemies of his, Jore and J. B. Rousseau. Was it possible? Could there be such ingratitude in the vilest thing that lived? It is to the credit of Voltaire's character, that he gave his abbé the benefit of the doubt till there was doubt no longer. It was in 1736 he wrote that memorable 'I hear that Desfontaines is unhappy, and from that moment I forgive him.' And the Thing stung again in a criticism on Voltaire's 'Elements of Newton'—meant to be offensive. He was again forgiven. Then he stung once more, and turned his benefactor into the liveliest, keenest, deadliest foe that ever man had.

When Algarotti was at Cirey in the November of 1735 Voltaire had addressed to him a few gay and graceful lines, meant only for his own eye, and in which the real nature of the relationship between the poet and

Madame du Châtelet was plainly acknowledged. The verses fell into the hands of Desfontaines. He wrote to ask permission to publish them in his journal. Publish them! If all the world knew that Voltaire was Émilie's lover, all the world had at least the decency of feeling to pretend that it knew nothing of the kind. Publish them! Voltaire, Émilie—nay, the dull *bon-homme* himself—protested passionately. Publish them! Not for a kingdom! But they were published. And Voltaire woke to revenge.

He would have been a worse man than he was if every bitter feeling in his soul had not been stirred now. He was always acutely sensitive to any slight put on his mistress's name, honour, intellect—on anything that belonged to her. If he was a good fighter when he was roused on his own account, he was a ten times better fighter when he was roused on hers. He was roused now. And he wrote the 'Préservatif.'

It begins by a collection of all the slips, mistakes, misstatements, printer's errors and illiteracies which he was able to find in two hundred numbers of Desfontaines' weekly paper which was called 'Observations on New Books.' They were grouped together with all a Voltaire's ability—never a point missed, and so arranged as to make M. l'Abbé supremely ridiculous. The 'Préservatif' purported to be by a Chevalier de Mouhy, a real person. At the end, the Chevalier presents to the public a letter he has received from M. de Voltaire giving the whole history of the Desfontaines affair in 1724—only not mentioning the nature of the crime of which the abbé had been accused.

The 'Préservatif' ran through Paris at the end of 1738 as such a pamphlet would. With it, there ran a

deadly epigram, and then a caricature, with another epigram beneath. Neither epigrams nor caricature would be tolerated by a decent age. They were all from the pen of M. de Voltaire. They told the nature of the abbé's crime. They were a shameful weapon, shamefully used: and most deadly. Voltaire gave Madame de Graffigny the 'Préservatif' to read. To mention the name of Desfontaines to him had soon the same effect as a red flag on a bull. He was beside himself when he thought of the man's base treachery and ingratitude. He was beside himself when he wrote the epigrams and drew the caricature. It is their only excuse. They need one.

He also wrote against Desfontaines, anonymously, a little comedy called 'L'Envieux': but it was never played.

On that Christmas Day of 1738, Madame du Châtelet received a document by the post. She read it alone and said nothing about it to Voltaire. Whatever else she was, she was a woman of very strong sense and very just judgment. The document she had received was the 'Voltairemanie' by Desfontaines—the retort to the 'Préservatif'—the blasphemous shriek of a lunatic—'the howl of a mad dog.' She herself wrote a reply to it—still preserved. Voltaire must not see it! His health was wretched as ever. He had just had an access of fever. He was acutely sensitive. She did right to hide it from him. He was not less considerate. He had also received a copy of that 'gross libel' and was hiding it from *her*. There must have been something good in the feeling these two people had for each other—in spite of quarrels and bickerings and the testimony of all the old women visitors in the world—they were so anxious to save



each other pain. They discovered their mutual deception on New Year's Day 1739 and were the easier for being able to talk over the affair together.

The 'Voltairemanie' is too savage to be sane. It brought that old accusation against Voltaire—a lack of personal courage. It recalled the affair of the Bridge of Sèvres and the affair of Rohan in terms which practice had made perfect in falsehood and offensiveness. It declared Voltaire liar as well as coward. In the 'Préservatif' he had said that Theriot had shown him a libel Desfontaines had written against his benefactor, while Desfontaines was staying with the Bernières at Rivière Bourdet and only just released, by that benefactor's efforts, from the Bicêtre. 'And behold!' says Desfontaines in the 'Voltairemanie,' 'M. Theriot has been obliged to deny all knowledge of the affair.'

Cirey at first was pretty calm, even under the matchless audacity of this last statement. Theriot had been staying at Cirey last October and had told with his own lips that very story just as Voltaire had told it in the 'Préservatif.' Voltaire did not take the matter so much to heart as Madame du Châtelet had feared. He decided at once to treat Desfontaines' attack as a criminal libel, and to take legal proceedings against him. He had witnesses as to the truth of *his* story. Madame de Bernières herself was one of them and prepared to write the most violent letters on behalf of a friend. And Theriot—Theriot whom Voltaire had made, loved, and trusted—why, Theriot had nothing to do but tell his tale as he had told it in letters to Voltaire and over the Cirey supper table last autumn.

And Theriot never uttered a word. How hardly and slowly the conviction of his treachery took possession



of Voltaire's mind, there is evidence in his letters to show. Theriot false! Theriot time-server, coward, frightened of the sting of a Desfontaines—impossible! The softest spot in Voltaire's heart was for this easy-going ne'er-do-weel who had been the friend of his youth—confidant and intimate for five-and-twenty years. Another man convinced of such a baseness as that, would have shaken the creature off—flung himself free of the traitor who had eaten his bread, accepted his money, lived on his fame, fattened on his benefits—and denied him.

And Voltaire wrote pleading, persuading, imploring: counselling repentance, eager to forgive: as a woman might have written to a scapegrace son whose sin she knows, whose reformation she hopes, and whom she must needs love for ever.

'Will you not have the courage to avow publicly what you have written to me so many times? . . . My honour, your honour, the public interest demand . . . that you should own that this miserable Desfontaines *did* write an abominable libel called the "Apology of *Sieur* Voltaire" and had it printed at Rouen, and that you showed it me at Rivière Bourdet.'

'I am your friend of twenty years. . . . Will it be to your honour to have renounced me and the truth for a Desfontaines?'

'Once again, do not listen to anyone who will counsel you to drink your champagne gaily and forget all else. Drink, but fulfil the sacred duties of friendship.'

'Make reparation, there is still time.'

'Everybody helps me but you. Everyone has done their duty, save you only.' And at last, 'All is forgotten, if you know how to love.'

There are many such letters of the early days of this year 1739—generous and pathetic enough. It was certainly Voltaire's interest to make Theriot speak the truth. But it may be believed that it was Voltaire's heart that was hurt by his silence. Émilie wrote to the false friend, imploring: so did the easy-going Marquis, and the fat lady watered *her* letter with her tears. The affair would not have been Voltaire's if he had left a single stone unturned. Madame du Châtelet wrote for him to obtain the influence of his prince—Frederick of Prussia. And all the wretched Theriot would say was, that if the episode had occurred, he had forgotten all about it. Madame de Graffigny recorded how, when she was at Cirey in that February of 1739, Voltaire received letters which threw him into a sort of convulsions, and Émilie came into her guest's room ('with tears in her eyes as big as her fist') to say the comedy they were to have played must be put off. The Graffigny was too graphic a writer to be literally accurate. But there is no wonder if Voltaire and Madame were greatly agitated and harassed as to what course to pursue next. The mission which took Madame de Champbonin, who must certainly have been one of the most goodnatured women who ever breathed, to Paris in January 1739 was to try the weight of *her* moral influence on Theriot. And at last the wretched creature, buffeted on all sides by letters at once heart-breaking, entreating, and indignant, *did* so far repent of his treachery, as to eat his words and consent to appear in some sort as the accuser of Desfontaines.

And now Voltaire, having won his Theriot, must move heaven and earth that in all points his libel suit may be carried to a successful issue. It was the

custom of that day for as many of the complainant's friends as possible to appear before the magistrate when the suit was brought—just to see how they could influence impartial justice. 'Nothing produces so great an effect on a judge's mind' the plaintiff in the present case wrote off plainly to Moussinot 'as the attendance of a large number of relatives. . . . Justice is like the kingdom of Heaven. The violent take it by force.' Voltaire had, then, not a friendly acquaintance in Paris who was not to be roused to help him. It was judged best that he himself should remain at Cirey. So Moussinot became his agent, and a very active agent he had to be. He was to hire carriages for the friends. He was to pay their expenses. All other business was to go to the winds. He was to search out nephew Mignot—Madame Denis's brother—so that he might be useful in stirring up *his* relatives. He was conjured to pursue the affair 'avec la dernière vivacité.' 'No *ifs*, no *buts*: nothing is difficult to friendship' the energetic Voltaire wrote cheerfully. The Marquis du Châtelet was sent up to Paris to see what *he* could do. Voltaire's old school friends, the d'Argensons and d'Argental, were not a little active. Prince Frederick wrote influential letters to his Court at home. Paris was in a ferment. Europe itself was interested. It was a *cause célèbre* of quite extraordinary vivacity. Through January, February, and March of 1739 Voltaire himself was working feverishly at Cirey. He rained letters on his friends. He wrote anonymous ones on Desfontaines to be circulated in Paris, not at all decent and very much to the taste of the age. He was certainly a matchless foe. He thought of everything. The resources of his mind were as wonderful as its energy.



He had the gift of making other people very nearly as enthusiastic as he was himself. To read his letters of this time, in cold blood one hundred and sixty years after, stirs the pulses still. The most apathetic reader himself feels for the moment Voltaire's dancing impatience for revenge, his hot anxiety for fear miserable Theriot should be false at the last after all, his throbbing, vivid determination that he *shall* be true.

The vigour of the man seems to have worn out at last even the malice of his enemies. Desfontaines was told that he must disavow his 'Voltairemanie'—or go to prison. So the honourable magistrate drew out a formula in which the honourable Desfontaines repudiated with horror, and in sufficiently servile terms, all idea of his being the author of that blasphemy and expressed 'sentiments of esteem' for M. de Voltaire! The whole case may be said to have rained lies. Everybody lied. Desfontaines' final lie was 'done in Paris, this 4th of April 1739.' Moussinot was commissioned to give Madame de Champbonin two hundred francs—which, to be sure, she deserved—and one hundred to the needy and complaisant Mouhy, who had been dubbed the author of the 'Préservatif,' 'telling him you have no more.'

The buffeting of that storm left Voltaire panting, feeble, and exhausted. 'There are some men by whom it is glorious to be hated' was an axiom of his own. Desfontaines was certainly one of them. But Desfontaines' hatred had power to the end of his life to rouse him to a frenzy of indignation. 'Take honour from me and my life is done' had not alas! been the spirit of either defendant or plaintiff in this case. But it had one good thing about it, though only one,—Voltaire's



dealing with Theriot. Theriot was forgiven as if Voltaire had been the Christian he was not.

On May 8, 1739, the two du Châtelets, Koenig (Madame's mathematical professor—a very good mathematician and a very dull man), M. de Voltaire and suite left Cirey for Brussels. Voltaire had been at Cirey nearly five years. He had learnt to love its solitude, its calm, its facilities for hard work. He had learnt to dread towns, if he had not learnt to love Nature. But Émilie wanted a change, so was quite sure that a journey and a different air were the very things for her lover's deplorable health. The process of reasoning is not unusual. Was not there too a certain du Châtelet lawsuit, of which they were always talking, which was already eighty years old and could only be settled in Brussels? So to Brussels they went.

Voltaire had to be dragged away from a tragedy, from 'Louis XIV.,' from elaborate corrections which he was making to the 'Henriade,' and from the study of Demosthenes and Euclid. Madame had an iron constitution herself, and could be at a dance all night and up at six the next morning studying mathematics—for fear Koenig should find her a dunce. *En route* for Brussels, they stopped at Valenciennes where they were entertained with a ball, a ballet, and a comedy. They had no sooner reached their quiet house in the Rue de la Grosse Tour, Brussels, than they left it to visit some du Châtelet relations, at Beringen, ten miles distant, and at Hain. They were back in Brussels by June 17. The city put herself *en fête* for them. J. B. Rousseau, who lived there, was 'no more spoken of than if he were dead.' Anyone with a human nature must have been pleased at *that*. Voltaire exerted himself and have a beautiful garden party with fireworks

one of those fine days to the Duc d'Arenberg and all the other polite society in Brussels. Of course he must needs superintend the firework preparations himself. Two of his unfortunate workmen fell from the scaffolding on to him, killing themselves, and nearly killing him. The event affected him not a little.

Then the Duc d'Arenberg invited his entertainers to stay with him at Enghien. The gardens were so exquisite that they almost reconciled even a Voltaire and a Marquise du Châtelet to a house where there was not a single book except those they had brought themselves. They played *brekan*: they played comedy: and the author of the 'Century of Louis XIV.' listened to the Duke's anecdotes of the days when he had served under Prince Eugene. They were back in Brussels by July 18. Useful Moussinot was there too. On September 4, 1739, and after an absence from it of more than three years, Voltaire found himself again in Paris.

If he had not wished to move to Brussels, he had much less wished to move to Paris. But 'the divine Émilie found it necessary for her to start for Paris, *et me voilà*.' That was the situation. They were both immediately engulfed in a social whirlpool—suppers, operas and theatres, endless visitors and calls—'not an instant to oneself, neither time to write, to think, or to sleep.' Voltaire wrote rather sorrowfully of the dreadful ennui of these perpetual amusements to placid old Champbonin, at Cirey. As for Madame du Châtelet—

Son esprit est très philosophe,  
Mais son cœur aime les pommpons

her lover had written of her to Sade in 1733, in perhaps the most apt and descriptive couplet ever made.

She was enjoying the *pompons* now. Paris was *en fête* for the marriage of Louis XV.'s eldest daughter to a prince of Spain. Madame was as energetic in her amusements as she was energetic in acquiring knowledge. She gratified her tastes for dress, talk and gaiety and her taste for mathematics all together. Koenig had come to Paris with them. Poor Voltaire wrote of her, not a little dolorously and enviously, 'Madame du Châtelet is quite different ; *she* can always think—has always power over her mind.' But to compose plays in this tumult!—it was impossible to the man at this time at any rate. His health was really as wretched as Madame said. It is not a little characteristic of him to find him ill in bed being copiously bled and doctored on Sunday, and gaily arranging a supper party on Thursday. But even his versatility and courage, even the goodhumoured patience with which he watched Émilie enjoying herself, were not inexhaustible. He had two plays to be produced in Paris. He did not wait to see either of them even rehearsed. Early in November 1739 he and Madame du Châtelet were spending a week or two at Cirey on their way back to Brussels.

## CHAPTER XII

## FLYING VISITS TO FREDERICK

SINCE that first letter of the August of 1736 the correspondence and friendship between Voltaire and Prince Frederick of Prussia had grown more and more enthusiastic. The devoted pair had from the first interspersed abstract considerations on the soul and 'the right divine of kings to govern wrong' with the most flattering personalities and hero-worship. Each letter grew more fervent and more adoring than the last. By 1740 Voltaire was Frederick's 'dearest friend,' 'charming divine Voltaire,' 'sublime spirit, first of thinking beings.' In Voltaire's vocabulary Frederick was Marcus Aurelius, the Star of the North, not a king among kings but a king among men. Voltaire dreamt of his prince 'as one dreams of a mistress,' and found his hero's Prussian-French so beautiful 'that you must surely have been born in the Versailles of Louis XIV., had Bossuet and Fénelon for schoolmasters, and Madame de Sévigné for nurse.'

Not to be outdone, Frederick announced that his whole creed was one God and one Voltaire.

There was indeed no extravagance of language which this Teutonic heir-apparent of six or seven and twenty and the brilliant withered Frenchman of six-and-forty did not commit. They *did* adore each other.



For Voltaire, Frederick was Concordia, the goddess of Peace—the lightbringer—the hope of the world—veiled in the golden mist of imagination, unseen, unknown, and so of infinite possibility and capable of all things. While heir-apparent Frederick was quite shrewd enough to know that a Voltaire might add lustre even to a king's glory, and be as valuable a friend as he was a dangerous foe.

By 1740 and the return of Voltaire and the Marquise from Paris to Brussels, Frederick had begun compiling the most sumptuous and beautiful *édition de luxe* of the 'Henriade' ever seen. He counselled his author friend to omit a too daring couplet here and there, and his author would have none of such prudence. Then Frederick must turn writer himself, and sent his Voltaire a prose work called 'Anti-Machiavelli' and an 'Ode on Flattery.'

'A prince who writes against flattery is as singular as a pope who writes against infallibility,' said Voltaire. The 'Anti-Machiavelli' is a refutation in twenty-six prosy chapters of the entire Machiavellian system. Voltaire called it 'the only book worthy of a king for fifteen hundred years,' and declared it should be 'the catechism of kings and their ministers.' He wept tears of admiration over it. He had it bound and printed. He wrote a preface for it. His transports of delight were sincere enough, no doubt. He was also sincere enough to criticise it to Frederick pretty freely, and to recommend 'almost a king' to be a little less verbose, and to cut out unnecessary explanations. It must be confessed that the 'Anti-Machiavelli' appears a very dull and trite composition to-day, and that the beautiful moral sentiments on the iniquities of war and the

kingly duty of keeping peace lose a good deal of their weight when one knows that a very few months after they were written, their author invaded Silesia and plunged Europe into one of the most bloody wars in history.

But when Voltaire waxed enthusiastic over the princely periods at Brussels in the January of 1740 he had no premonition of that future. Compared with other royal compositions 'Anti-Machiavelli' is a masterpiece. Even to one of the shrewdest men who ever breathed it might well have given hopes that its author would be a king not as other kings, a benefactor and not an oppressor of humanity, a defender of all liberal arts, a safeguard of justice, freedom, and civilisation. Old Frederick William was dying. The time was at hand when his son might make promise, practice. On June 6, 1740, he wrote to Voltaire: 'My dear friend, my fate is changed, and I have been present at the last moments of a king, at his agony and at his death;' and prayed friend Voltaire to regard him not as king but as man. And Voltaire replied to him as 'Your Humanity' instead of 'Your Majesty,' and saw in the heavens the dawn of a golden day, and on earth all things made new.

On July 19, Voltaire arrived at the Hague to see about recasting and correcting a new edition of the 'Anti-Machiavelli,' now being printed there. There were certain things in it safe enough for a crown prince to have written anonymously, but hardly prudent to appear as the utterances of a king.

Voltaire was quite as active and thorough on that King's behalf as on his own. He wasted a whole fortnight of his precious time on Frederick's business in Holland. He had infinite trouble with the printer, Van

Duren, and stooped to trickery (to be sure, Voltaire thought it no abasement) to get the necessary alterations made in the royal manuscript. At length this most indefatigable of beings himself brought out an authorised version of the 'Anti-Machiavelli.' Voltaire's corrected edition and Frederick's original version both appear in a Berlin issue of the Works of King Frederick the Great. A comparison of the two shows the versatile Voltaire to be the most slashing and daring of editors. He cut out, as imprudent, as much as thirty-two printed pages of the royal composition. The time had not yet come when Frederick was grateful for such a hewing and a hacking as that. But the time was very soon to come when he would have been but too glad if Voltaire had flung into the fire the whole of 'Anti-Machiavelli,' and the memory thereof.

The friendship between editor and author grew apace, meanwhile, daily. They sent each other presents of wine and infallible medicines. Voltaire had an *escritoire*, designed by Martin, specially made in Paris for Frederick's acceptance. But they had long discovered that the handsomest of presents and the most adoring of letters were but a feeble bridge to span the space that separated them, and the question of a meeting, long and repeatedly urged by Frederick, became imminent.

Since Frederick's first letter it had been the *rôle* of Madame du Châtelet to stand by and watch a comedy in which she was not offered a part. To be a passive spectator was little to the taste of her supremely energetic temperament. It was not long before she learnt to be jealous. She was a great deal too clever not to know from very early times that, but for her, Voltaire



would have been a satellite to the Star of the North, instead of to any woman in the world. When his friendship with Frederick began he was no doubt true to her because he wished to be true. But how short a time was it before he was true only from a sense of duty! Madame du Châtelet, with her vigorous passions, was not the woman to be satisfied with a cold, conscientious affection like that. She must be first—everything! Her woman's instinct told her to mistrust Frederick, and she did mistrust him. Then the mistrust grew to dislike; dislike to hate; and hate, war to the knife.

Oh what beautiful compliments that pair exchanged through Voltaire, or directly in the most flattering letters to each other—in those four years between 1736 and 1740! Frederick said the most charming things about Émilie. She was always the goddess, the sublime, the divine. Flattery costs so little and may buy so much.

When he read her 'Essay on the Propagation of Fire' he wrote to Voltaire that it had given him 'an idea of her vast genius, her learning—and of your happiness.'

Did Madame look over her lover's shoulder and smile not a little grimly with compressed lips at those last words? 'Of your happiness'! Very well. Leave him to it then. What can your court or kingship give him better than happiness, after all? It is to be feared that if Émilie had rendered Voltaire's life 'un peu dure' in the time of Madame de Graffigny she rendered it much harder now, and that there was not much question of real happiness between them. To be fought over was a much more trying position for a nature like Voltaire's than to be one of the fighters.



And there is no hell on earth like that made by a jealous woman.

Within easy reach too, in tempting sight, were the pleasures of a king's congenial society, honours to which a worldly-wise Voltaire could be by no means insensible. Yet in almost all his letters to Frederick he reiterates his decision that he will not leave his mistress; that he is bound to her in honour and gratitude; that he has chosen his fate and must abide by it.

In this spring of 1740 she had published her 'Institutions Physiques,' in which she now championed Leibnitz against Newton, as Voltaire had championed Newton against Leibnitz. Frederick went into ecstasies over it—to its authoress; and damned it with very faint praise indeed to his confidant, Jordan. Madame may have suspected that perfidy. King Frederick, when he became king in that May of 1740, guessed he had met his match in that resolute woman whom he addressed variously as 'Venus Newton' and the 'Queen of Sheba.' If Frederick wanted to see Voltaire—well, then, he must have Venus too. Of that, Venus was determined. Voltaire returned to Brussels from the Hague in the early days of August 1740. It was not the slightest use Frederick writing to him on the 5th of that month from Berlin: 'To be frank . . . it is Voltaire, it is you, it is my friend whom I desire to see, and the divine Émilie with all her divinity is only an accessory to the Newtonian Apollo;' and more plainly still the next day, 'If Émilie *must* come with Apollo, I agree; although I would much rather see you alone.' Madame du Châtelet was for Voltaire a sovereign far more absolute than any on earth. He pulled a very wry face, shrugged his shoulders, and resigned himself to her determination with as much good-humour and

nonchalance as he could compass. It was arranged that Frederick should meet Voltaire and Venus at Antwerp on September 14, and should return with them for a brief visit, *incognito*, to the du Châtelet's hired house in Brussels.

One can fancy the baffled rage of the Marquise when at the very last moment the news arrived that that subtle Frederick had artfully developed an attack of ague which would quite prevent him meeting Émilie at Antwerp and Brussels, but need be no obstacle in the way of Voltaire, alone, coming to see his sick friend for two or three days at the Château of Moyland, near Cleves. Even Madame du Châtelet's jealousy and resource could find no excuse to keep her lover now. He went—feeling no doubt rather guilty and very glad to get away—the precise sensations of a schoolboy who has escaped for a day's holiday from a very exacting master. He was not going to play truant for long! After all, Madame *had* been dreadfully *exigeante*! One thinks of her with pity somehow—Voltaire thought of her with something very like pity too—left alone in Brussels, beaten, angry, and restless, and adding daily to an already magnificent capital of hatred for Frederick.

That meeting at Moyland is one of the great *tableaux* of history. Voltaire himself painted it in letters to his friends when its memory was green and delightful: and twenty years after, with his brush dipped in darker colours. The ague, though convenient, was not a sham. Voltaire found Solomon, Marcus Aurelius, the Star of the North, huddled up in a blue dressing-gown in a wretched little bed in an unfurnished room, shivering and shaking and most profoundly miserable. 'The sublime spirit and the

first of thinking beings' sat down at once on the edge of the royal pallet, felt the King's pulse and suggested remedies. The day was Sunday, September 11, 1740: very cold and gloomy, as was the disused château itself. It is said Voltaire recommended quinine. Anyhow, the fit passed, and by the evening Frederick was well enough to join a supper of the gods.

Three men, who had been visitors at Cirey and were all renowned for learning or brilliancy, were of it—Maupertuis, Algarotti, and Kaiserling. Frederick forgot his ague, and Voltaire his Marquise. They discussed the Immortality of the Soul, Liberty, Fate, Platonics. On the two following nights the suppers were repeated. At one of them Voltaire declaimed his new tragedy 'Mahomet.' Frederick wrote of him just after as having the eloquence of Cicero, the smoothness of Pliny, the wisdom of Agrippa, and spoke, with a more literal truth, of the astounding brilliancy of his conversation. As for Voltaire, he found for a brief space the realisation of his dream—the incarnation of his ideal. Here was the philosopher without austerity and with every charm of manner, forgetting he was a king to be more perfectly a friend. Writing after twenty years—after strife and bitterness—Voltaire still spoke of Frederick as being at that day witty, delightful, flattering—ay, still felt in some measure what he felt in fullest measure at the Château of Moyland in 1740, the siren seduction of the King's 'blue eyes, sweet voice, charming smile, love of retirement and occupation, of prose and of verse.' With a mind keenly acute and searching, Voltaire was youthfully susceptible to fascination. He had to the end a sort of boyish vanity, and Frederick greatly admired him. But that alone would not account for the fond pride



and affection with which he regarded this young King—and which might have been almost the partial and sanguine love of a father for a promising son. No man ever wore better than Frederick the Great that fine coat called Culture. He fitted it so well that even a shrewd Voltaire thought it his skin, not his covering; and when he flung it on the ground and trampled on it, still regretfully loved him—not for what he had been, but for what he had seemed.

The three days came to an end. On September 14 Frederick took Maupertuis to Paradise, or Potsdam, with him, and condemned Voltaire to Hell, or Holland (this is how Voltaire put it), where he was to stay at the Hague in an old palace belonging to the King of Prussia and complete his arrangements for the publication of his edition of the 'Anti-Machiavelli.' The Marquise was at Fontainebleau paving the way for Voltaire's return to Paris, and writing to Frederick to ask him to use his influence to win Cardinal Fleury, the Prime Minister's, favour, for 'our friend.' Fleury had formerly met Voltaire at the Villars', 'where he liked me very much;' but that liking had since turned to dislike. Madame worked at once with enthusiasm and with wisdom—that rare combination of qualities which can accomplish everything. She said herself, not a little bitterly, that she gave her lover back in three weeks all he had laboriously lost in six years: opened to him the doors of the Academy; restored to him ministerial favour. He sent a presentation copy of the 'Anti-Machiavelli' to Cardinal Fleury presently, and the powerful Cardinal, now that Voltaire was a great King's friend and the active Marquise was at Court, suddenly discovered that he never had had any fault but youth. 'You have been



young ; perhaps you were young a little too long — but nothing worse than that ; really nothing. The two exchanged flattering letters. Then came events which changed the face of Europe. On October 20, 1740, died the Emperor Charles VI. He was succeeded by Maria Theresa of three-and-twenty. The Powers were looking hard into each other's faces to see if peace or war were written there. 'The slightest twinkle of Fleury's eyelashes' was hint sufficient for this daring and versatile Voltaire to try a new rôle. When he started off to Remusberg on November 4 or 5, 1740, to pay another little visit, already arranged, to friend Frederick, he went not only as a visitor, but to discover the pacific or bellicose disposition of Anti-Machiavelli, who had already written, a little oddly, that the Emperor's death upset all his peaceful ideas.

The journey from the Hague to Remusberg took a fortnight. Voltaire had as companion a man called Dumolard, whom Theriot had recommended for the post of Frederick's librarian. Their travelling carriage broke down outside Herford, and Voltaire entered that town in the highly picturesque and unpractical costume of his day on one of the carriage horses. 'Who goes there?' cried the sentinel. 'Don Quixote,' answered Voltaire.

Remusberg was *en fête* when they reached it. There were suppers, dances, and conversation, a little gambling, delightful concerts—the gayest court in the world. Frederick played on the flute and was infinitely agreeable. The Margravine of Bayreuth, his sister, was of the party. Voltaire showed Frederick Cardinal Fleury's complimentary letter on the 'Anti-Machiavelli.' There was no change on the King's face as he read it; or if there was a change, it escaped even a

Voltaire. If Voltaire had been brilliant at Moyland he was twice as brilliant here—in spite of the fact that he could only describe himself to Theriot as ‘ill, active, poet, philosopher, and always your very sincere friend.’ He busied himself in procuring for that faithless person a pension from Frederick, for having been the King’s agent in Paris. All the time, through the suppers and the talk and the parties, he was watching, watching, watching. The visit lasted six days. Voltaire had never in his life tried to find out anything for so long without finding it. But when he parted from Frederick at Potsdam he had not the faintest suspicion that that invasion of Silesia upon which the King was to start in twelve days’ time was even a possibility.

Frederick pressed his guest to prolong his stay. He went to Berlin for a brief visit to pay his respects to the King’s mother, brother, and sisters; but left there on December 2 or 3, 1740, and then returned to Potsdam to say good-bye to his royal host—and to look into the royal heart, if that might be. But it was not to be.

Voltaire was anxious to be back in Brussels in time to receive Madame du Châtelet on her return from Paris, where her husband had just bought a fine new house. He wrote a little epigram to his host before he left, in which he gaily reproached the King as a coquette who conquers hearts but never gives her own. He had been at least astute enough to divine that there was Something his master hid from him. And his master responded with a little *badinage* on that other coquette who was drawing Voltaire to Brussels.

They parted friends—and warm friends. But there

was a highly practical side to both their characters which came to the fore when Frederick bade Voltaire send him the bill of his expenses at the Hague, and Voltaire added to that bill the expenses of the journey to Remusberg, taken at Frederick's request. It was a large total—thirteen hundred écus—but it was not an unjust one. It has been happily suggested that it at least contained no charge for Man's Time, and this man's time was of quite exceptional value. 'Five hundred and fifty crowns a day' grumbled Frederick to Jordan; 'that is good pay for the King's jester, with a vengeance.' But when the King's jester is a Voltaire, the King must expect to pay for him. That was Voltaire's view of the question, no doubt.

A series of accidents befell him on his journey home. He was a whole month getting from Berlin to Brussels, and twelve days of the time ice-bound in a miserable little boat after leaving the Hague. In a wretched ship's cabin he worked hard on 'Mahomet' and wrote voluminous letters.

One of them, dated 'this last of December' 1740, was to Frederick—cordial, flattering, and expansive. Having been dutiful enough to tear himself away from 'a monarch who cultivates and honours an art which I idolise' for a woman 'who reads nothing but Christianus Wolffius,' Voltaire was a little disposed to grudge that act of virtue, and to make the most of it. He was anxious, too, to prove to Frederick that he had left him chiefly to finish the du Châtelet lawsuit—not merely 'to sigh like an idiot at a woman's knees.' 'But, Sire . . . there is no obligation I do not owe her. The headdresses and the petticoats she wears do not make the duty of gratitude less sacred.' The last cloud of illusion must have been dispelled long before the

Marquise du Châtelet's ex-lover could have written those words.

He saw her now not only as she was, but at her worst. 'Men serve women kneeling: when they get on their feet they go away.' Shall it not be accounted for righteousness to a Voltaire that he got on his feet and went back to her?



## CHAPTER XIII

## TWO PLAYS AND A FAILURE

BEFORE Voltaire reached Brussels—nay, before he had written to Frederick that letter from the ice-bound boat off the coasts of Zealand—he had received one of the greatest mental shocks of his life. The news of the invasion of Silesia came upon him like a thunderclap. This—after the ‘Anti-Machiavelli’! This—after all they had hoped, planned, dreamed! Where was that smiling kingdom, Arcadia, wherein all liberal arts were to flourish, where were to be for ever peace, tolerance, plenty? Where indeed? But Voltaire was nothing if not recuperative. There is not a single instance in his life when he sat down and cried over spilt milk. He was disillusioned now—and bitterly disillusioned. ‘After all, he is only a King,’ he wrote; and again, ‘He is a King, that makes one tremble. Time will show;’ and to English Falkener, in English, ‘My good friend the King of Prussia, who wrote so well against Machiavelli and acted immediately like the heroes of Machiavelli . . . fiddles and fights as well as any man in Christendom.’ Fiddles and fights! Well, since it was impossible to adore Frederick as Concordia, one might as well admire him as Mars. Making the best of it was part of Voltaire’s creed. He did what he could to live up to

it now. He congratulated Frederick on his victories. The pair continued to write each other long letters, much interspersed with facile rhymes. They were still friends, and fast friends. But it was no longer the boy-hero, the Messiah of the North, the youthful benefactor of human kind whom Voltaire adored: it was a far cleverer and a far less lovable person—the real Frederick the Great.

Voltaire's interminable journey did near its end at last. By January 3, 1741, he was in Brussels. Did he feel a little bit like the truant schoolboy returning in the evening expecting a whipping, and all his excuses for so long an absence disbelieved? Of course Madame du Châtelet disbelieved them. A month getting back from Berlin to Brussels! That was a very likely story indeed, and quite on a par with friend Frederick's artful ague at Moyland! Had quite planned to be back in Brussels before I arrived from Paris! Had you indeed? And you expect me to believe that too?

The unhappy Marquise had been eating her heart out in suspicion and impatience, waiting for him. 'I have been cruelly repaid for all I have done for him,' she wrote to d'Argental out of this angry solitude; and again, 'I know the King of Prussia hates me, but I defy him to hate me as much as I have hated him these two months.' She overwhelmed Voltaire with reproaches directly she saw him. Her tongue was dreadfully voluble and clever. The Marquis was away, as usual. There was nothing to distract her attention, and Voltaire's excuses *did* sound very lame indeed. He had a very bad quarter of an hour; but, after all, it was only a quarter of an hour. They were reconciled—and tenderly. If Madame was scolding

and exacting, devoted to the metaphysics of Christianus Wolffius, extraordinarily clad and with a painful taste in headgear, she loved her lover and had done much for him. And Frederick the Great had invaded Silesia. If that invasion was a triumph for him, it was also a triumph for one of the bitterest foes he had, Madame du Châtelet.

At Brussels, in that January of the year 1741, there was then, for a time, some sort of renewal of the brief honeymoon days of Cirey, before the Prussian heir-apparent's earliest letter, when the chains that bound the first man in Europe to his Marquise were forged of warm admiration and not barren duty.

Voltaire was soon writing that it was not Frederick's perfidy that had hastened his return—that if he had been offered Silesia itself he would have come back to his mistress just the same. She had never seemed so far above kings as she did now. Her unjust reproaches even were sweeter than the flatteries of all courts. He had left her once for a monarch, but he would not leave her again for a prophet. And she—a true woman after all—wrote that Frederick could take as many provinces as he pleased, provided he did not rob her of the happiness of her life.

Voltaire was busy in these early months of 1741 with his play 'Mahomet,' for which he had a quite fatherly love and admiration. The English Lord Chesterfield, with whom he had dined in London, was a visitor at Madame du Châtelet's Brussels establishment, and to him Voltaire read selections from the new drama. It would have been immediately produced in Paris; but the best actors were unable to take part in it, and it was judged better to postpone its appearance there.



In this April Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet went to Lille, to stay with Madame Denis and her husband. At Lille, 'Mahomet' was performed by a company of French players, who had been half engaged by Voltaire to go to Prussia in the employ of Frederick, and then thrown over by that busy monarch. The audience, each of the three nights the play was performed, was numerous and passionately enthusiastic. The clergy of Lille were powerfully represented and entirely approving. M. Denis and his plump three years bride of course came to clap the latest effort of Uncle Voltaire. Uncle Voltaire had a keen eye on the face, and a lean forefinger on the pulse of that audience to see how certain daring passages affected it. What Lille applauded, Paris might pass. On the first night, at the end of the second act, a despatch from the King of Prussia was handed to M. de Voltaire in his box. He read it aloud. 'It is said the Austrians are retreating, and I believe it.' It was the declaration of the victory of Mollwitz. Lille had its own reasons for being passionately Prussian, and received the news with shouts of delight. If anything had been needed to complete the success of 'Mahomet,' that despatch would have done it. The bearer of good news is always a popular person. But nothing was needed. The clergy of Lille begged, and were granted, an extra performance of the play for their especial benefit at the house of one of the chief magistrates. Orthodoxy seemed to be taking this Voltaire under her strong wing at last, and Voltaire accepted the situation with a very cynic grimace and a great deal of satisfaction. He and Madame du Châtelet left Lille with the most sanguine hopes of seeing 'Mahomet' shortly and successfully produced in Paris. Until November 1741 they were mostly in Brussels,



watching the progress of the du Châtelet lawsuit. Madame had a little quarrel on hand with her tutor Koenig, in which Maupertuis joined.

In November they went to Paris and stayed, not in that splendid Palais Lambert which the Marquis du Châtelet had bought, but which was not yet completely furnished, but in Voltaire's old quarters—the house which had belonged to Madame de Fontaine-Martel. In December they returned to Cirey for a month; and in the January of the new year 1742 were again in Brussels. The lawsuit was positively progressing, and so favourably that they felt justified in spending the rest of the winter in Paris. Immediately on their arrival in the capital they were plunged into that 'disordered life' which the Marquise loved and Voltaire loathed. 'Supping when I ought to be in bed, going to bed and not sleeping, getting up to race about, not doing any work, deprived of real pleasures and surrounded by imaginary ones'—as a description of fashionable life the words hold good to this day. 'Farewell the court,' he wrote again; 'I have not a courtier's health.' He spoke of himself as being always at the tail of that lawsuit—which the indefatigable and persistent Marquise *must* pursue to the bitter end.

They lingered in Paris through May, June, July—in their fine Palais Lambert now—and all the time no 'Mahomet.' Voltaire should have been used to disappointments and delays, if any man should. He brought out everything he ever wrote at the point of the sword. There were always anxiously waiting to take offence the acutely susceptible feelings of a Church, a king, a court, a nobility, and a press censor. This time, first of all, it was the Turkish envoy who was being fêted in Paris, 'and it would not be proper to

defame the Prophet while entertaining his ambassador,' said the polite Voltaire. The second cause of delay was much more serious. Exactly at a moment when the policy of Frederick the Great appeared peculiarly anti-French and that monarch was enjoying the brief but vivid hatred of Paris, there crept out one of Voltaire's rhyming letters to the Prussian King, in which the courtly writer lavishly praised and flattered his correspondent. M. de Voltaire had to be alert and active in a moment. He pursued his old line of policy. First of all, I did not write the letter. Secondly, if I did, it has been miscopied. Thirdly, if I did write it and it has not been miscopied, the reigning favourite of Louis XV., Madame de Mailly, must help me out of my dilemma. Voltaire wrote and asked her assistance. She could not do much. But Cardinal Fleury still looked upon Voltaire as a person to be conciliated as an influence on Prussia. He read the play, and approved. The censor did likewise. The murmur of the streets and the *cafés* was still against the too Prussian Voltaire. But for once the authorities actually seemed to be with him.

On August 19, 1742, 'Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet' was performed to a house crammed with the rank, wit, and fashion of Paris, who applauded it to the echo. D'Alembert appeared for literature. The Bar and the Church were generously represented. The author himself was in the pit. This might be another 'Zaire,' only a 'Zaire' written in the plenitude of a man's mental powers—stern, not tender—grand, not pathetic—the expression of matured and passionate convictions, instead of vivid, impulsive feelings. Voltaire was eight-and-thirty when he produced 'Zaire,' and eight-and-forty when he produced 'Mahomet.'

How fully he had lived in those ten years! Then he felt: now he knew. He had often dared greatly in his plays: in 'Mahomet' he dared all.

Lord Chesterfield had regarded the tragedy as a covert attack on Christianity. It must have been the sceptical reputation of M. de Voltaire which made Lord Chesterfield so think. No impartial person reading it now could find an anti-Christian word in it. It is a covert attack on nothing. It is an open attack on the fanaticism, bigotry, intolerance, which degrade any religion. It is a battle against the 'shameful superstition which debases humanity.' Worth, not birth, is its motto. 'All men are equal: worth, not birth, makes the difference between them,' says Omar, one of the characters. In this play is found that famous and scornful line 'Impostor at Mecca and prophet at Medina.' There is scarcely a sentence in it which is not a quivering and passionate protest against the crafty rule of any priesthood which would keep from the laity light, knowledge, and progress. 'I wished to show in it,' said Voltaire to M. César de Missy, 'to what horrible excess fanaticism can bring feeble souls, led by a knave.'

If there were dissentient voices—and there were—the applause of that brilliant first night drowned them. The play was repeated a second time and a third. Voltaire may have begun to feel safe: to congratulate himself that at last free thought uttered freely was permissible even in France. He was always hopeful. But his enemies were too mighty for him. Working against him always, untiring, subtle, malicious, was the whole envious Grub Street of Paris led by beaten Desfontaines and jealous Piron. The man in the street was now bitterly against him too.



The Solicitor-General, who, on his own confession, had not read a word of the play, much less seen it acted, was soon writing to the Lieutenant of Police that he 'believed it necessary to forbid its performances.' On the valuable evidence of hearsay, he found 'Mahomet' 'infamous, wicked, irreligious, blasphemous,' and '*everybody says* that to have written it the author must be a scoundrel only fit for burning.' It was still in the power of this remarkable officer of most remarkable justice to prosecute Voltaire for the 'Philosophic Letters,' which he threatened to do, if 'Mahomet' were not removed. Feeling ran so high that friend Fleury himself was compelled to advise the withdrawal of the play. It was performed once more—that is, in all four times—and then withdrawn.

A man of much more placid disposition might have been roused now. But this time Voltaire was too disgusted, too sick at heart with men and life, to have even the strength to be angry. He and Madame du Châtelet left for Brussels on August 22. He was ill in bed by August 29—ten days after that first brilliant performance—trying to sit up and make a fair copy of the real 'Mahomet' to send to Frederick the Great.

The spurious editions, shamefully incorrect, which were appearing all over Paris, must have been the overflow of the invalid's cup of bitterness.

'It is only what happened to "*Tartuffe*,"' he wrote from that sick bed to Frederick. 'The hypocrites persecuted Molière, and the fanatics are risen up against me. I have yielded to the torrent without uttering a word. . . . If I had but the King of Prussia for a master and the English for fellow-citizens! The



French are nothing but great children; only the few thinkers we have among us are so splendid as to make up for all the rest.' And a day or two later to another friend: 'This tragedy is suitable rather for English heads than French hearts. It was found too daring in Paris because it was powerful, and dangerous because it was truthful. . . . It is only in London that poets are allowed to be philosophers.'

The words sound as if the writer were weary, *las*, at the end of his tether. On September 2, 1742, he went for a very few days' rest and refreshment to Aix-la-Chapelle to see Frederick the Great, who had just signed a treaty of peace. Madame du Châtelet did not object to that brief holiday, and entertained no idea of making a third person thereat herself. She was more confident of her Voltaire now—hopeful that he was hers, body and soul, for ever. When he was at Aix, Frederick offered him a house in Berlin and a charming estate—peace, freedom, and honour for the rest of his life. And Voltaire said he preferred a second storey in the house of his Marquise—slavery and persecution in Paris, to liberty and a king's friendship in Berlin. 'I courageously resisted all his propositions' was his own phrase. For this man when he was virtuous always knew it, and keenly felt how much pleasanter it would have been to be wicked instead. Fleury approved of the little visit, and though it *was* a holiday and Frederick *was* his friend, Voltaire still did his best to subtly find out the royal disposition towards France.

On September 7 he returned to Brussels, not having been absent a week. Madame du Châtelet longed to get back to the gaieties of Paris, though Voltaire, who was ill enough to be able to write

nothing but verses, said Madame, was well content in Brussels.

He went back to the capital, however, in this November of 1742, and was not a little *vif* and active in getting imprisoned certain publishers who had produced 'the most infamous satire' on himself and Madame du Châtelet.

He was soon also busy on a scheme which he had tried successfully ten years before. When 'Ériphyle' failed he brought out 'Zaire.' When the authorities damned 'Mahomet' he produced 'Mérope.' Ten years—ten years of battles and disappointments, of wretched health and domestic vicissitudes—had not robbed him of one iota of his pluck, energy, and enterprise. He flung off that lassitude and despair of life which came upon him in those few dismal days in Brussels: searched among his manuscripts: discovered 'Mérope,' and went out to meet the enemy with that weapon in his hand. It had been written in the early days at Cirey, between 1736 and 1738. It was the play over which the Graffigny had 'wept to sobs.' Voltaire had wept over it himself. He felt what he wrote when he wrote it, so acutely that there was no wonder his readers were moved too. His own wit and pathos always retained their power to touch him to tears or laughter whenever he read them, which is more unusual.

'Mérope' is a classic tragedy—'a' tragedy without love in it and only the more tender for that,' wrote Voltaire to Cideville. It turns on maternal affection. The idea is uncommon and daring enough. Would the venture be successful? Graffigny had wept indeed; but then Graffignys weep and laugh easily, especially when the author is also the host. Mademoi-

selle Quinault and d'Argental had told him that 'Mérope' was unactable to a French *parterre*.

The Marquise had mocked at it; but then the Marquise had happened to be in a very bad temper with the playwright. Who could tell? If taking pains could make it succeed, a success it would be. The author, himself no mean actor, attended the rehearsal and coached the players. When Mademoiselle Dumesnil, who was cast for 'Mérope,' failed to rise to the height of tragedy demanded in the fourth act where she has to throw herself between her son and the guards leading him to execution, crying 'Barbare! il est mon fils!'—she complained she would have to have the devil in her to simulate such a passion as Voltaire required. 'That is just it, Mademoiselle,' cried he, 'You *must* have the devil in you to succeed in any of the arts!' There was never a truer word. He did manage to put a good deal of the devil into Mademoiselle. She became a famous actress. His own fervour was infectious. The players, who had disliked the play at first, caught his own enthusiasm for it at last. On February 20, 1743, it was first represented to a house crowded with persons who had admired 'Mahomet' and sympathised with the treatment of 'Mahomet's' author. It was the best first night on record. Mademoiselle Dumesnil kept the house in tears throughout three acts, it is said. For the first time in any theatre the enthusiastic audience demanded the appearance of the author. He was in a box with the Duchesse de Boufflers and the Duchesse de Luxembourg and entirely declined to present himself on the stage. His Duchesses tried to persuade him, with no better success than the audience. He kissed the Duchesse de Luxembourg's hand and left the box,



‘with a resigned air,’ and tried to hide himself in another part of the house. But he was discovered, and drawn into the box of the Maréchale de Villars for whom he had once felt something more than the feelings of a friend. How long ago that was—Villars and its white nights—a young man of five-and-twenty, and Madame, gracious, *svelte*, and woman of the world to the tips of her fingers! She had become *dévoté* since. ‘She was made to lead us all to Heaven or Hell, whichever she chooses,’ wrote Voltaire airily. As for himself, *he* had his Marquise du Châtelet. The moment was not one for reminiscences in any case. The *parterre* was not to be silenced. The story runs that it vociferously insisted that Madame de Villars, the young daughter-in-law of his old love, should kiss M. de Voltaire. The Maréchale ordered her to do so, and Voltaire wrote after that he was like Alain Chartier and the Princess Margaret of Scotland—‘only he was asleep and I was awake.’

He enjoyed that evening as only a Frenchman can enjoy. He was all his life intensely susceptible to the emotions of the moment; vain with the light-hearted vanity of a very young man; loving show and glitter, applause and flattery—a true child of France, though one of the greatest of her great family. Was it not a triumph over his enemies too? What might not follow from it? Voltaire said hereafter that the distinction between himself and Jean Jacques Rousseau was that Jean Jacques wrote in order to write, and he wrote in order to act. Of what use was the dazzling success of ‘*Mérope*’ if it could not buy him a place he had long coveted and gratify one of the darling desires of his soul?

On January 29 of this same year 1743 had died



Voltaire's friend, Cardinal Fleury. He left vacant one of the forty coveted chairs in the French Academy. Who should aspire to it if not the man who had written the 'Henriade' and the 'English Letters,' 'Zaire,' 'Alzire,' 'Mahomet,' and 'Mérope'? It would be no empty honour, but a safeguard against his enemies: the hall-mark of the King's favour.

The King was for his election; so was the King's mistress, Madame de Châteauroux; but against it, and bitterly against it, were Maurepas, Secretary of State, and Boyer, Bishop of Mirepoix, and tutor of the Dauphin. Voltaire always called Boyer the 'âne de Mirepoix' from the fact that he signed himself 'anc: de Mirepoix,' meaning that he was formerly bishop of that place—and it must be conceded that he was one of the most obstinate old imbeciles who ever fattened at a court. He has been well summed up as a man who 'reaped all the honours and sowed none.' *His* argument was that it would offend Heaven for a profane person like M. de Voltaire to succeed a cardinal in any office. To be sure, the chairs in the Academy were designed to reward literary, not ecclesiastical, merit. But what was that to a Boyer?

Voltaire wrote long letters which are masterpieces of subtlety and special pleading to prove what a good Christian and Churchman he was, and how suited in character, as well as ability, to be the successor of a prelate. He did not stop at a lie. In a letter to Boyer written at the end of February he declared himself a sincere Catholic, and added that he had never written a page which did not breathe humanity (which was true enough) and many sanctified by religion (which was very untrue indeed). He conclusively proved (cannot one fancy the twinkle in his eager

eyes as he penned the words?) that 'the "Henriade" from one end to the other is nothing but an *éloge* of a virtue which submits to Providence,' and that most of the 'English Letters,' current in Paris, were not written by him at all. The mixture of the false and the true is so clever that it *might* have deceived anybody. Voltaire may have argued with himself that since he knew it *would* deceive nobody, the lying was very venial indeed. What did it matter what he said now? It was the master motives which had ruled his life, the passion for freedom of thought and action, the sceptical temper, the burning longing for light and knowledge which panted in every page of every play, in every line almost of his graver works, which counted against him. He was excluded from the Academy. The Ass of Mirepoix won M. de Voltaire's seat for a bishop—of very slender literary capacity indeed. Voltaire wrote lightly that it was according to the canons of the Church that a prelate should succeed a prelate, and that 'a profane person like myself must renounce the Academy for ever.'

But he was bitterly disappointed not the less. Frederick the Great, in a kingly pun, said that he believed that France was now the only country in Europe where 'ânes' and fools could make their fortunes. In 1743 England elected Voltaire a member of her Royal Society. During the year four other chairs fell vacant at the French Academy. But the greatest literary genius of the age, perhaps of any age, was not even mooted as a candidate. It was Montesquieu, the famous author of 'L'Esprit des Lois,' who said scornfully of the occasion and of Voltaire:

'Voltaire n'est pas beau, il n'est que joli. It would be shameful for the Academy to admit him, and it

will one day be shameful for it not to have admitted him.'

In what a far different and far larger spirit it was that Voltaire criticised his critic—'Humanity had lost its title deeds. Montesquieu found them and gave them back.'

## CHAPTER XIV

## VOLTAIRE AS DIPLOMATIST AND COURTIER

VOLTAIRE had a little distraction from his disappointment about the Academy in the April of this 1743 in the marriage of Pauline du Châtelet, the vivacious little amateur actress of Cirey. Pauline was fresh from a convent and aged exactly sixteen. The Italian Duc de Montenero-Caraff, the bridegroom, was distinctly elderly, and, as sketched in a few lively touches by Voltaire, very unprepossessing. The Marquise maintained *she* had not arranged the alliance. But *mariages de convenance* were the established custom of the day. Who knows? Voltaire had been for freedom of choice in the case of niece Denis, it is certain. Pauline was not his to dispose of. He would appear to have shrugged his shoulders and given her his blessing. With it, she disappears out of the history of his life.

In June he had another chagrin. The performance of his play, 'The Death of Cæsar,' already acted in August 1735 by the pupils of the Harcourt College, was stopped on the very evening before it was to have been produced in public. Not many days after, M. de Voltaire left Paris on his fourth visit to Frederick the Great. Frederick wanted him socially as the wittiest man in the world, the most daring genius of the age.



If the French Academy would have none of him, the Prussian Court knew better. Besides—besides—could not this subtle Solomon of the North rely on himself to find out from his guest something of the temper and the disposition of France toward Prussia? The guest was not less astute. The rôle of amateur diplomatist pleased his fancy and his vanity. What if he had not been successful in it before? A Voltaire could always try again. He left Paris then in June, pretending that his journey was the outcome of his quarrel with Boyer, but really as the emissary of Richelieu on a secret mission to Frederick to warn him of the danger of allowing King George of Hanover and England to help Maria Theresa to her rights, and meaning to win over the cleverest monarch in Europe to an alliance with France. It was a beautiful scheme. It had first ‘come into the heads’ of friend Richelieu and Madame de Châteauroux; then the King had adopted it, and Amelot, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was ambitious enough to particularly appeal to Voltaire’s audacity. The King of France was to pay all expenses: which was not unjust. The Bourbons seldom spent their money so wisely. Madame du Châtelet was the only person intrusted with the secret of the journey’s real object. She felt that it was due to herself to have a fit of hysterics since her Voltaire was leaving her for this Frederick, and she had it. But she kept the secret. If she was a little proud in her heart of the honour such a mission implied, yet her grief at the departure of her ‘ami’ was so unrestrained as to make her and it the laughing-stocks of Paris. Frederick ‘is a very dangerous rival for me,’ she wrote on June 28, 1743. ‘If I had been in Voltaire’s place I should not have gone!’ ‘I am staying

here in the hopes of getting "Cæsar" played and so hastening his return.'

Voltaire set off in very excellent spirits. It would so annoy Boyer to see his enemy protected by the most powerful monarch in Europe—and by a monarch who was not at all above making *mots* on an 'Anc: de Mirepoix'! 'I had at once the pleasure of revenging myself on the Bishop . . . of taking a very pleasant little trip, and being in the way of rendering services to the King and the state.' In July he was writing to his friends, and to Amelot, from 'a palace of the King of Prussia at the Hague'—a little humanly proud of being able to date his letters from such a place, keen for the fray, sick in body as usual, and vividly alert in mind.

On August 31 he arrived at Berlin. The first news he had to communicate to Amelot was the victory of George II. of England at Dettingen. What honours could be too great for a man who, at such a juncture, made Prussia the friend of France? Madame du Châtelet, keeping her counsel at home, must have had high hopes for her Voltaire. And her Voltaire, at Berlin, cherished them for himself.

To all appearances indeed the visit was but a *fête*, and a gorgeous *fête*. Berlin was gay with balls, operas, and parties. Sometimes there were ballets, and nightly almost those royal suppers where, said the guest, 'God was respected, but those who had deceived men in His name were not spared.' Voltaire had a room adjoining Frederick's, and the King came in and out of the visitor's apartment familiarly. The old potent charm which these two men had for each other was at work again. But not the less, through the glamour, the wit, the wine and the laughter,

each pursued his secret object, adroit, thorough, and unsleeping.

Voltaire played the *rôle* of diplomatist as he played all rôles—brilliantly. He was delightfully gay and easy. He seemed so volatile and so gullible. He threw himself into the pleasures of the hour with all his French soul. An ulterior motive? The man was *bon enfant*, *bon conteur*, *bon* everything. He had come to enjoy himself and was doing it to the full.

‘Through all,’ he wrote, ‘my secret mission went forward.’ He despatched immense diplomatic documents to his country *via* Madame du Châtelet. He drew up a famous series of questions, to which friend Frederick was to append such answers as would bare the secrets of his Prussian soul to France. The diplomatist had immense conversations with the monarch, which he reported. Frederick wrote Voltaire a most beautiful open letter to show in Paris, wherein he complimented France on her Louis XV., and Louis XV. on his Voltaire. He renewed his pressing invitations to Voltaire to come and live at Berlin—nay, did more. He worked behind his back so as to further embroil him with Boyer, and make France too hot to hold him. ‘That would be the way to have him in Berlin.’

Frederick was his guest’s friend, and his devoted friend. But he thought it no breach of friendship to trick him where he could, and kept closed the book of his intentions and his soul.

The fact was that where Voltaire was but a brilliant amateur, Frederick was the sound professional; that what this daring Arouet took upon himself for the nonce, was the business of the King’s life. Voltaire was not above trickery: but Frederick tricked better. His answers to that famous series of



questions are evasive, or buffoonery. Voltaire counted that he had not done badly in his mission. But Frederick had done better.

The visit finished with a fortnight at Bayreuth in September 1743, where Voltaire and the King were the guests of the King's sisters, where were gaiety, laughter, and wit—'all the pleasures of a court without its formality.' Voltaire distinguished himself by writing three charming madrigals to the three royal ladies. They do not admit of translation. It is only in their original tongue that their grace, ease, and delicacy can be appreciated. But for that kind of versifying they are the model for all time. If Voltaire had not far more splendid titles to fame, he would have gone down the ages as the daintiest and wittiest writer who ever made sonnets on his mistress's eyebrow, trifled with graceful jests, and flattered with daintiest comparisons.

In the early days of October he was back in Berlin for a few days *en passant*. On October 12 he and his King parted there, not without much show of sorrow, and some of the reality of it.

Voltaire had found out 'that little treason' whose aim was to keep him in Prussia; but at these parting moments 'the King excused himself and told me he would do what I liked to make reparation.' As for Frederick, he, in Voltaire's own words, had 'scented the spy.' They could no longer trust each other. To the misfortune of both, they loved each other still.

On October 12, then, Voltaire left for Brussels. On the 14th his travelling carriage was upset and he was robbed by the people who came to his assistance. The wretched village in which he hoped for shelter that evening, he found in the process of a conflagration.



At last he reached Brunswick, where for a few days he was royally entertained by the Duke. Finally, he returned to Brussels.

It is not to be supposed that the divine Émilie had been sitting contented and smiling in Paris while her lover was addressing tender rhymes to princesses in Bayreuth. Voltaire had been away four months—four heart-burning, chafing, angry months. What unsatisfying food for the heart were diplomatic despatches after all! Voltaire was one whole fortnight without writing a single letter to his mistress. She had to learn his movements ‘from ambassadors and gazettes.’ ‘Such conduct would alienate anyone but me,’ she wrote to d’Argental, always her confidant. Then, to add insult to injury, was that delay at the court of the Duke of Brunswick. Courts and kings! Madame du Châtelet was weary of them. She started up in a passion and left Paris: was ill with a nervous fever at Lille, and feverishly reproachful still when she met her Voltaire at last. That inevitable storm blew over as it had blown over before. The sun came out again, though it was a sun in a clouded sky. The pair went to Paris together about the middle of November 1743: Voltaire to report on his mission and to be, he hoped, substantially rewarded.

But the ill-fortune which always dogged him beset him now. Amelot, the Foreign Minister, fell out of favour, and with him his *protégé*, Voltaire.

No two people in the world were so used to chagrins and disappointments as the two who returned to Brussels in February 1744, and in the spring to Cirey, and applied their old panacea for every evil in life—work. It succeeded. It was generally successful. Very few letters belong to the early months of

this year. There was not time even for letter-writing. Monsieur Denis died in April, leaving behind him a bouncing widow of seven-and-thirty.

It was in April too that Voltaire received a very satisfactory little courtly consolation, to compensate him for many rebuffs. Richelieu engaged him to write a play for the wedding festivities of the Dauphin and the Infanta of Spain, which were to take place in the autumn, and which would presently demand the presence of M. de Voltaire at Versailles.

It is not necessary to say that Voltaire took immense trouble over his *bagatelle*, because he always took immense trouble over everything. All his works are as good as he could make them. He called his play 'The Princess of Navarre.' He laid the scene there in delicate compliment to the Infanta—and for the practical reason that he could introduce into it both French and Spaniards, with their gorgeous medley of costume. Rameau was to write the music. There were to be the loveliest ballets, processions, and songs. The scenery was to be unique in splendour. 'The Princess of Navarre' is what would now be called a comic opera, and as such was certainly unworthy of the genius of Voltaire. But it was not unworthy of his shrewdness. If it would but gain him some trifling post at Court, the favour instead of the fear of the King, why, then it would give him, too, the right to live where he liked in peace, would cripple the power of Boyer, of censors, of Desfontaines, might open to him the doors of the Academy and gain him liberty to think—aloud. It *was* worth while after all. He worked at it night and day. He wrote immense letters about it to Richelieu and to d'Argenson. Cirey was delightful, priceless — 'Cirey-en-félicité' once

more. 'To be free and loved . . . is what the kings of the earth are not.' Nevertheless, to be free and loved in Cirey alone was not enough. 'I am engaged in writing a *divertissement* for a Dauphin and Dauphiness whom I shall not divert,' said he, and again to Cideville: 'Me! writing for the Court! I am afraid I shall only write foolery. One only writes well what one writes from choice.'

But he wrote, rewrote, altered, improved, not the less. On July 7, President Hénault, the friend of Voltaire's friend Madame du Deffand, came to spend the day at Cirey. He found it 'a delightful retreat, a refuge of peace, harmony, calm, and of mutual esteem, philosophy and poetry.' Voltaire was in bed when the guest arrived: working hard there, as usual. Summer was on the land. The house was a marvel. Madame, recalled from her exact sciences, was a charming hostess. If Voltaire was fifty years old and ailing, if he had to look back on many honours missed and favours given to meaner men, his 'Princess of Navarre' was but the more delightful a compliment for being paid so late and so unexpectedly. He read it to the President, who wept (though the 'Princess' is not at all pathetic), and was very nearly as interested in it, and as pleased with it, as the eager author himself.

In September, Voltaire and Madame came up from Cirey to Champs-sur-Marne, a village only five leagues from Paris, to take part in the rejoicings which celebrated Louis XV.'s recovery from an illness and return from a campaign, and to arrange about the production of the 'Princess.'

One night Madame insists on her Voltaire driving up with her those five leagues to Paris, to witness the fireworks and festivities. Madame has her own carriage



and her country coachman, unused to the city. She is in *grande tenue* and diamonds. The carriage gets into a crowd—that light-hearted, light-headed mob of Paris—and cannot move an inch until three o'clock in the morning. Out gets Madame followed by her lean Voltaire (not a little disgusted and amused and having the very greatest admiration for this extraordinary woman's pluck and spirit), pushes her way through the crowd, marches straight into President Hénault's house in the Rue Saint-Honoré and takes possession of it. The President is from home. Madame sends for a chicken from a restaurant, and she and her Voltaire sit down to supper with perfect philosophy and enjoyment, and drink to the President's very good health.

Voltaire recounted the story to Hénault a few days afterwards. The man who had undertaken to write a court *divertissement* had laid himself open to all kinds of social adventures, amusements, boredoms. In the beginning of the January of 1745 he took up his abode at Versailles to superintend rehearsals, arrange scenery, and accommodate his verses to Rameau's music.

It was twenty years since Voltaire had stayed at the French Court. Did he remember how it had wearied and sickened him? He forgot nothing. The Court was but a means to an end then, and was but a means to an end now. He wrote to Theriot that he felt there like an atheist in a church. 'Don't you pity a poor devil who is a king's fool at fifty?' he asked Cideville; '... worried to death with musicians and scene-painters, actors and actresses, singers and dancers.' He complained how he had to rush from Paris to Versailles, and write verses in the post-chaise; how he must take care to praise the King loudly, the Dauphine delicately,



the royal family softly, and to conciliate the Court without displeasing the town.

Since it must be done, Voltaire was the man to do it as it had never been done before. On February 18, 1745, died Armand Arouet, aged nearly sixty. Voltaire received the news only seven days before the *fête* was to take place, and hastened from the court to the funeral of his 'Jansenist of a brother.' The two had met little of late. But they had always been separated by a gulf wider than that of any physical distance—a diversity of character and ideas. Voltaire could no more understand an Armand than an Armand a Voltaire. Long after, at Ferney, Voltaire told Madame Suard how his brother had had so great a zeal for martyrdom that he had once said to a friend, who did not seem to care about it, 'Well, if *you* do not want to be hanged, at least do not put off other people!'

The fanatic left the sceptic as little of his fortune as he dared, having due regard to public opinion. Voltaire was enriched by his brother's death only by six thousand francs per annum. He feigned no overwhelming sorrow at his loss. He was back at Versailles before the contents of the will were known to him, putting the last touches to his 'Princess.'

The *fêtes* began on February 23. They were as gorgeous as that old *régime* knew how to make them—with a prodigal gorgeousness which perished with that *régime* itself and will be no more for ever.

A special theatre had been built in the horse-training ground near the palace. Time, labour, money—the lavish expenditure of each was incalculable. At six o'clock on the evening of February 25 there assembled one of the most brilliant and splendid audiences that ever gratified the heart of a playwright. The King,

who was certainly nothing in the world if he was not an imposingly decked figurehead, was there with his royal family. The great ladies glittered in diamonds. The nobles were in the splendid robes of their order. It was a night to remember.

‘The Princess of Navarre’ was acted to an audience who talked gaily all through it and went into raptures of delight and applause when it was finished. M. de Voltaire compared the chatter to the hum of bees round their queen. But the King—that dullest of all gross mortals—condescended to express himself amused. He commanded a second performance. If that fashionable audience *did* make more noise than the *parterre* of the Comédie, Voltaire could afford to shrug his shoulders. ‘The King is grateful. The Mirepoix cannot harm me. What more do I want?’ he wrote to d’Argental. His Majesty told Marshal Saxe that that ‘Princess’ was above criticism, and Voltaire thereupon told Madame du Châtelet that he looked on Louis XV. as the very best critic in the kingdom. The moment was one of laughter and triumph. To be sure, it had not been gained without hard work. In addition to the ‘Princess,’ Voltaire had written a poem on the ‘Events of the Year’ (1744) in which he may be said to have fooled Louis to the top of his bent, and paid that monarch the most outrageous compliments upon his personal courage and his popularity.

But it was the means to an end—an end which, to Voltaire, justified any means. This brilliant M. de Voltaire was so very entertaining and fair-spoken that he must on the spot be made Historiographer of France at an annual income of two thousand francs, and on the very next vacancy Gentleman-in-Ordinary

to Ourselves! What nobler reward could wit and merit hope for? On April 1, 1745, the brevet of Historiographer was signed by Louis XV. On April 16 Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet hastened to the bedside of her son, sick of the smallpox at Châlons, to save him, if that might be, from the 'ignorant tyranny of the physicians.' Voltaire, as has been said, did so save him, with much lemonade and a little common-sense. He became ambassador in England under the ministry of Choiseul; and, at last, victim of the Revolution.

After forty days of quarantine the Historiographer of France rejoined the Court.

## CHAPTER XV

THE POPE, THE POMPADOUR, AND  
'THE TEMPLE OF GLORY'

THE new favour Voltaire had obtained had to be paid for like any other advantage of fortune. Then, as now, the finer the post, the more ennui and exaction in filling it. The nearer he climbs to the sun, the more scorched and weary the climber. Voltaire found out that simple fact of nature very soon.

The truth is he was a great deal too clever to be wasted. Was it a diplomatic letter that was required? The Historiographer had had practice in such things, and would naturally do them better than anyone else. A poem? He was a poet. An epigram? Once upon a time his epigrams had been so dangerously clever that he had positively been bastilled for them. Four days after the *fête* the newly made courtier had written to Theriot that he was so utterly weary he had neither hands, feet, nor head. He spent the whole day hunting up anecdotes and the whole night making rhymes. He had the reputation of a wit, and the Court felt defrauded if he did not make a *bon mot* every time he opened his lips. Then came the French victory of Fontenoy over the English—and of course the Historiographer must celebrate that historical event in an ode. It is but just to Voltaire to say that if he was in some



sort belying his principles by being at Court at all, when there, he did, in so far as might be, live up to them. He had pleaded for peace pretty openly in those official documents, and pointed out better ways to glory than the way of battle.

But, after all, though war is deplorable, if war there must be, let *Us* win by all means if we can. Even a peace advocate might feel some such sentiment. One peace advocate, with his facts drawn direct from a letter of d'Argenson's, written from the scene of action itself about May 16, 1745, sat down in a fine glow of enthusiasm and produced his heroic poem, of three hundred lines and entitled 'Fontenoy,' on the spot. Paris was delighted. The King was content. Five editions were sold in ten days. The Historiographer, of course, corrected, embellished, altered, indefatigably. 'This battle has given me a great deal more trouble to celebrate than it gave the King to win it,' he observed, very truly. He was plagued out of his life by the Court ladies who really *must* insist on the poet flattering in his poem all their cousins and lovers who had taken even the smallest part in the fight. 'My head swims,' he wrote. He grumbled. But he was not ill content. Presently, 'Fontenoy' received the compliment of being clumsily burlesqued, and a gay Voltaire answered the burlesques in a 'Critical Letter from a Fine Lady to a Fine Gentleman of Paris'—dainty, light, rallying, graceful—and as goodhumoured as witty. If his 'Princess' had won him favour, 'Fontenoy' had sealed it. He had gained the King. To keep him there remained but to gain also the woman and the priest who ruled him.

Looking back long after on this period of his life—  
'It was not the time of my glory if I ever had any,'

said Voltaire. It was not. To fawn on that sensual stupidity the King, to cajole the Pope, to flatter the mistress—they were not occupations that commended themselves to a man with such a passion for work and such a supreme consciousness of a mission in life crying aloud to be fulfilled, as Voltaire. But the end—the end was everything. How should he speak truth if he were gagged? What hope of freedom to speak in these times without the royal indulgence? The means were contemptible enough, be it granted. But they were the only means. What matter how dirty the road if it led to the goal? That was Voltaire's idea—not highminded, nor quite without excuse, and perfectly characteristic. He plunged through that Court mire alert, gay, and vigorous; flattered the women; amused the courtiers; was eternally witty and gallant; and just sarcastic enough in his wit to make himself respected.

And then he set to work to gain the Pope. Hardly any other transaction of his life shows him as matchlessly clever and ingenious as this one. He *was* a sceptic—that is, if a sceptic be one who believes in a creed of his own rather than the creed of other persons. He had the reputation of an atheist. The Church had banned his books, and discovered some subtle innuendo against herself in every line he wrote. Worse than all, the man was a satirist, a jester, a mocker, who viewed the huge pretensions and the gigantic claims of Rome with a cynic gleam in his eyes and a laugh on his lips.

He started his bold campaign by reading the whole of the Pope's works and complimenting that very good-natured representative of St. Peter, Benedict XIV., on their ability. Benedict thereupon sent his 'dear son' a couple of beautiful medals with his own portrait

engraven thereon as a return civility. 'He looks like a *bon diable*,' wrote the graceless Voltaire to d'Argenson, 'who knows pretty well how much *all that* is worth.'

And then on August 17 Voltaire wrote to beg permission to dedicate that 'Mahomet,' which Lord Chesterfield had considered a covert attack on Christianity, to his Holiness himself. The letter with which he sent the play is a masterpiece of subtlety. The Voltairian daring and adroitness, which are without their counterpart in history, succeeded of course. If one can be at once supremely bold and supremely clever, success is a foregone conclusion. Voltaire was lucky in his man—and knew his man to perfection. Benedict XIV. was *bonhomme* rather than an ideal pope, and *did* accept his own infallibility and the astounding assumptions of his Church, with a great many comprehensive qualifications.

He was quite wise enough in his generation to perceive that it was better to have a subtle Voltaire for a friend than an enemy. He therefore sent him his Apostolic Benediction: and accepted the dedication of 'your admirable tragedy' in a charming letter dated September 19. Voltaire, on his part, said he laid a work against the founder of a false religion at the feet of the chief of the true religion: 'kissed the Pope's holy feet' and 'sacred purple' indefatigably in every letter he wrote; flattered the cardinals and went into ecstasies over Benedict's virtues. The correspondence between the two was printed as a preface to a new edition of 'Mahomet' in French and Italian; and M. de Voltaire, with his tongue in his cheek and not a little satisfaction in his soul, is proclaimed before all men the *protégé* of Rome!



Long before this desirable consummation, as far back as May 3 of this 1745, he had written with a gay confidence that the devout might now ask *his* protection for this world and the next. The subject never ceased to afford his sense of irony the most delicious amusement. But better than being amused he was henceforth 'covered from his enemies by the stole of Heaven's vicegerent.' The Pope, it has been seen, did not accept the dedication of 'Mahomet' until September. Before that Voltaire was hard at work to win another influence—the influence of Madame d'Étoiles, afterwards the Marquise de Pompadour.

The summer of 1745 was but a dull summer at Court. In May the King joined his army. What were the courtiers and flatterers to do with no one to flatter and toady? The firmament was dark without its Sun: and would have been darker yet but for the steady rising of one brilliant star. Clever head and cold heart, a cool and persistent ambition, a most subtle intellect, and a morality which never interfered with an early and plainly avowed intention to become the King's mistress—such was the woman who 'with her harlot's foot on its neck' ruled France for nineteen years, lost it India and Canada, and spurred it, galloping, to the Revolution. With every charm, every grace, every accomplishment that can make a woman irresistible—all carefully learnt for that one noble end, the King's subjugation—five-and-twenty years old, the wife of a wealthy *bourgeois*, M. d'Étoiles, living in the country, and having already begun, and coolly waiting to finish, her conquest of the royal heart—such was the Pompadour when Voltaire first knew her. In May he was her correspondent. In June he was her visitor—drinking her tokay, and paying her the loveliest





MADAME DE POMPADOUR.

*From the Painting by François Boucher in the possession of Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild.*



compliments, and discussing with her gravely all subjects in heaven and earth, for she had not only natural cleverness, but a fine cultivation, and, in her heart, said Voltaire, was always 'one of us.' She confided in him her design on—she called it her passion for—the King.

In July Voltaire was addressing verses to his 'dear and true Pompadour' and saying he might well call her in advance by a name which rhymed with 'amour' and would soon be the loveliest name in France. She was formally created Marquise and came up to Court. She was the mistress of Louis. She was the mistress of France. And—she was the friend of Voltaire.

If he had thought it necessary to justify himself for that friendship, only he did not think it necessary at all, he might have argued, as he might have argued as to his alliance with the Pope, that it was a pity kings should be governed by priests and women; but that since they were, the best and wisest thing to do was to get the influence of the priests and women on the right side. What might a Pompadour not do? 'One of us'—that meant a philosopher, mentally capable of seeing new points of view, acquiring new truths, breaking from old superstitions. In the hollow of her hand she held the happiness or the misery of thousands. Not only the welfare of a proud kingdom but the well-being of those silent suffering units who peopled the kingdom, hung, as too often before, on a shameless woman's smile or frown. And if she could make or mar a country and a nation, how much more a court poet?

Voltaire had begun writing to Rameau's music an opera called 'The Temple of Glory,' to celebrate Louis XV.'s victories in his campaign. It was just

as well from a Pompadour's point of view to be on the right side of such a very poignant wit as M. de Voltaire's. She *was* on the right side of it. With all his usual audacity the poet inserted in his opera the most unmistakable and complimentary allusions to the Pompadour and her King and to the relations between them. He was busy with other work too. Only one disease—it was an internal complaint this time—and an opera on hand at once would have been idleness indeed. All through the autumn of this 1745 he was writing the authorised historical account of the King's campaigns, an honour which d'Argenson had procured for him, and which afterwards swelled into his 'History of Louis XV.' Now, it was known as the 'Campaigns of the King.' With a very rare love of justice, at a time when national feeling ran high, he wrote to Sir Everard Falkener, now secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, to ask him for first-hand facts regarding the war so that the historian might do justice to the 'many great actions done by your nation'—our enemies, the English. He had time to read the back numbers of three past years of the 'London Magazine' in English. Madame du Châtelet was always with him. In June they had been at Châlons for a fortnight with Madame du Deffand. In October they went to Fontainebleau—Madame creating not a little talk and scandal by insisting, on the way there, on a right, or a supposed right, of her family to ride in the best place in the first coach after the Queen's—to the exclusion of other noble and indignant ladies, who had, or thought they had, similar rights.

In the comparative quiet of Fontainebleau Voltaire worked at his 'Campaigns'—'as I always work—with passion.'



He and Madame returned to Versailles in November in time to welcome the King. On the 26th of that month the Sun was beaming graciously in his firmament again—after a campaign in which he had done nothing but look on from a very cautious distance. And on November 27, 1745, appeared 'The Temple of Glory.'

The two principal characters in it are Trajan, great in war but the friend of peace, emperor, Roman—and lover: and Plotine, the beloved. The dullest among the audience must have seen whom these characters represented.

Ta plus belle gloire  
Vient du tendre amour,

sang the chorus to Trajan. And did not *amour* rhyme with Pompadour for ever and ever? Among the spectators were the injured Queen, who had no reason now to love this M. de Voltaire; and Madame du Châtelet, taking advantage of another hereditary right and sitting in her royal mistress's presence. Rameau's music was delightful and the dancing perfection. Richelieu had superintended the *mise-en-scène*. The curtain went down on a tumult of applause. And Voltaire, with that boyish French capacity of his for being intoxicated by the very thin wine of a social success, strolled up to the royal box and said to Richelieu, to be overheard of the King, 'Trajan est-il content?'

There are a dozen versions of the story. There are several vehement denials that any such incident took place. But there is no smoke without fire, and the episode is characteristic enough of a pleased and audacious Voltaire. He does not ever allude to it himself: but that may be accounted for by the fact that Trajan was *not* very content with the too daring question. He had reason to be a little sulky at his royal

name being so openly coupled—with Plotine's. One authority has it that he turned his back on Voltaire and addressed compliments to Rameau.

But 'The Temple of Glory' was repeated; and the Sun came out from behind the little cloud as bright as ever.

The next court *divertissement*, performed on December 22, was not indeed written by Voltaire, but by Jean Jacques Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, with whom Voltaire was now brought into a polite correspondence, and with whom he was hereafter to fight as he had never fought even with Rousseau's old exiled namesake at the Hague.

On January 16 of the new year, 1746, Longchamp entered as a kind of confidential valet into the service of Madame du Châtelet, and from her service was shortly drafted into that of M. de Voltaire. Half secretary, half servant, and all observer, Longchamp lived to write memoirs of unusual interest and fidelity, and to make Voltaire a proof of the fallacy of the saying that no man is a hero to his valet. Longchamp, Collini, Wagnière, who were in turns the servant-secretaries of Voltaire, have all painted his picture as most generous, hasty, and kind, with the sensitive temper of genius and the forethought and consideration for others, even for dependents, which genius too often lacks. To Voltaire's generation the *canaille* were as dirt beneath the feet; but not to Voltaire. Irritable and impulsive in speech, he had at times to his servants the manners of the old *régime*; but he had ever the heart of a better age.

Abundantly generous—'a miser of nothing but his time'—one servant speaks in warm terms of his 'solid and durable indulgence and goodness,' and another of

his kindness, sympathy, and forgiveness. The character that masters give their servants is often unreliable through ignorance or weak indulgence; but the character that servants give their masters rarely falls into either of these errors.

From that fiery inquisition, the inquisition of the domestic eye, Voltaire is one of the few great men in history whose character comes out better than it went in.

All the early months of 1746 were taken up in keeping the vantage ground he had gained and in gaining more. He wrote letters to Italian cardinals in Italian. He reminded the Pope of the dutiful existence of his dutiful son. He pleased the Pompadour. He amused sulky Trajan. He began a regular Voltairian battle against Charles Roy, an old scurrilous minor poet, who stood not ill at Court, himself hoped for a chair in the Academy, and had written an unsuccessful rival piece to Voltaire's 'Princess.' These occupations were very fatiguing. But they were essential. On March 17 a fresh vacancy fell in at the French Academy, and who should have it if not Voltaire? The gods were more favourable now. The candidate canvassed for himself feverishly. He wrote an artful letter to the Lieutenant of Police and a beautiful one to Father La Tour, one of his old schoolmasters, expressing a warm affection for religion and the Jesuits. If the thing was to be done at all it must be done thoroughly.

On April 25, 1746, the greatest literary man of the age, who was fifty-two years old and a member of almost every other Academy in Europe, was at last formally elected to the Literary Society of his own country. On May 9 he read before it his preliminary discourse, Voltairian in every line.



## CHAPTER XVI

## THE ACADEMY, AND A VISIT

Who is it that having climbed to a height does not look on the prospect that it affords him, and wonder if that prospect be worth the bogs and the mire, the stones and the boulders, the steep places and the thorns that lay on the way to it? Voltaire was not given to useless reflections. But it could but occur to his cynic soul that his friendship with a king's mistress had gained him a reward that all his writings and genius could not; just as he had declared in a verse, whose gay bitterness is Voltaire's only, that his 'Henriade,' his 'Zaire,' and his 'Alzire' had not won him a single glance of kingly favour, while for a 'farce of the fair,' 'The Princess of Navarre,' honours and fortune had rained on him. He might well be a cynic.

What use would that coveted chair among the Forty be to him now he had it? Was it the hallmark, the sign and seal of talent? That sign and seal were on every line the man had written. He, who had made by his works so startling an impression on the human mind that, though he had a host of enemies, adorers, fearers, none could be indifferent with regard to him, had surely no need of the cold distinction of an academical honour. But he thought



that it would be valuable as a refuge from *lettres de cachet* and official interference. It conferred various legal privileges. It would be his passport, obtained from red-tapeism, to be flaunted in the face of it, to show the Voltairian right to say what a Voltaire pleased. The position further gratified a naïve and very human vanity. And now I *am* here I will be so uncommonly active, lively, and reforming as will drive my thirty-nine solemn, pompous, formal, conservative, elderly brethren pretty well distracted!

It was *de rigueur* in the inaugural address to do nothing but praise Cardinal Richelieu and flatter one's predecessor in the chair. And up gets M. de Voltaire and delivers a brilliant discourse on the French language and French taste—smooth, polished, graceful, and with the grip of the iron hand felt always through the velvet glove.

'Gentlemen, your founder put into your society all the nobility and grandeur of his soul: he wished you to be always free and equal.'

'No great things without great trouble.'

'It is precisely, gentlemen, because there is so much wit in France that there is so little real genius.'

No doubt those thirty-nine literary fogies had some sort of notion what a daring spirit they had admitted into their prosy body before that discourse was ended. The artful Voltaire did not forget to introduce into it dainty compliments to such varied persons as the King of France, the Empress of Russia, and the Pope; Frederick the Great and Maupertuis (who spoke and wrote the great French language as if it were their own); Montesquieu, Fontenelle, and Hénault, who adorned it; and my old schoolmaster, d'Olivet.

Sympathising and delighting in his genius and success was a certain new obscure young friend of Voltaire's, who had just come up to Paris to seek his fortune, and who was named Marmontel.

'Sine virtute amicitia existere non potest,' says Cicero. If a man may be judged by the company he keeps, Voltaire's character should not be meted a wholly unmerciful sentence. He had too in himself, in an extraordinary degree, the noble talent of friendship.

Fifty years after his schooldays he was still writing to Abbé d'Olivet, in terms of tenderest respect and affection. He began, as has been seen, his lifelong attachment to his 'guardian angel,' d'Argental, at the same date and place. 'I am not like most of our Parisians,' he wrote to Cideville, 'I love my friends better than superfluities; and I prefer a man of letters to a good cook and two carriage horses. One always has enough for others when one knows how to restrict oneself.' He acted on that principle through life. There must surely have been something more than commonly lovable in a character which three years earlier than this, in 1742, had commanded the love and admiration of Vauvenargues, the young soldier, the splendid thinker—daring spirit and noble mind. That friendship appealed not in vain to Voltaire on the finest side of his character, at the very moment when a Court, a king, a Pompadour, worldly gain, and the bauble of official favour tempted him on his worst. The pair wrote each other long letters, philosophic, thoughtful, enlightened. Vauvenargues loved to call Voltaire his 'dear master.' And the master had for the pupil the tender respect, the generous admiration which a great father might feel for the possibilities of

a son whom his fond hopes love to fancy greater still. The son went the way of all flesh in 1747, aged thirty-two. He left the world only one work ; but those 'Maxims' have been justly said to give the soul of man an impetus towards truth. They are too little known.

Marmontel was of a different *calibre*. A young, struggling, literary man in the provinces, he wrote to the chief of his profession, now sunning in court favour, for his advice. 'Come up to Paris,' wrote the impulsive Voltaire at the end of 1745. He thought letters the noblest of all professions. To be sure, it was one not merely precarious, but generally ruinous. But then, to deliver one's message—to help truth by speaking it—a Voltaire, if he could, would have encouraged the merest stutterer to do it, such as Marmontel was not. In the midst of the preparations for 'The Temple of Glory' he had time to obtain the promise of a post for his *protégé* from the Comptroller-General of Finance. Up comes Marmontel to Paris, six louis in his pockets, and a translation. And the Comptroller-General has fallen out of favour and has no place to give away ! Voltaire broke the news as gently as he could. Perhaps he looked the while out of his brilliant eyes to see how this new metal stood the furnace. Marmontel said that Adversity was his oldest acquaintance and that he was not afraid of her. And M. de Voltaire took upon himself to provide for him until his talents should make him independent. A hundred and fifty years ago and in Paris such conduct does not strike the reader as nearly so generous and Quixotic as if the same event had occurred in London and to-day. Yet the profession of letters was very much worse then than it is now. Voltaire had had



unsuccessful literary *protégés* dependent on him for an unpleasantly long time before this, it will be remembered. *He* remembered it, no doubt. He was more fortunate in the present instance. Taught, advised, encouraged by Voltaire, Marmontel became the Marmontel of successful tragedies, of the 'Contes Moraux,' of 'Bélisaire,' and of the 'Memoirs.'

In his hope that his chair at the Academy would afford him a little peace and rest, Voltaire was at first very much mistaken. His new honour was a signal for every enemy he had in the world—and he had a great many—to set upon him. Every envious, snarling cur of the scurrilous Grub Street of Paris came yelping at the mastiff's heels. Old Roy burlesqued and lampooned him; and the thin-skinned poet, who should have been true enough to his own philosophy to have laughed at such a poor, miserable, effete old foe, was up and at him in a trice, whipping and stinging him with verses and epigrams whose rancour still glows and burns.

Other skits and satires followed. And Voltaire, with authority on his side for once—to say nothing of the Pompadour—hunted out, accused, prosecuted the authors in a vehement activity and enthusiasm. To be sure, on one occasion, in his zeal he had the wrong person arrested, and had to pay damages in a law court for false imprisonment; besides promising, after the fashion of the time, never to do anything so naughty again.

These skirmishes lasted for many months; nay, the Travenol case, for wrongful imprisonment, went on for two or three years. Voltaire came out of such affairs with neither success nor glory. He was always both too quick to anger, and too quick to forgive.



The latter quality was as much a snare to him as the former.

By the August of 1746 this energetic courtier had reached the fourth act of a play written to order for the Dauphine, and entitled 'Semiramis.' The Dauphine died at that juncture; but its author continued 'Semiramis' all the same. He paid a flying visit in September to a very old friend, the Duchesse du Maine. In October he and Madame du Châtelet came up to Fontainebleau with the Court, and stayed at Richelieu's house there, which he had lent them. Just as she was about to leave Versailles, the whole of Madame's servants, except Longchamp, had left her in a body. Now, as at Cirey, she was a mistress not a little expectant and inconsiderate, and by fits and starts, if not habitually, mean. The invaluable Longchamp saved the present situation. He was not sorry when, at Fontainebleau, he was allowed to renounce a post in which he sometimes appears to have acted, literally, as the Marquise's lady's maid, for that of secretary to the quick-tempered and kind-hearted M. de Voltaire.

A new weapon was put into Voltaire's hands in December wherewith to defend himself from his enemies, and, having been promised the post for two years, he was made Gentleman of the Chamber to Louis XV. What an honour, what a splendid honour, for the author of the 'Henriade' and the 'English Letters'—for the man who had already begun to inaugurate a new era of thought in Europe, and who was to make Voltairism such a power in the world that it would one day shake Catholicism on her immemorial foundations! What an honour—what a noble honour! M. de Voltaire did not meet with at all a warm reception from his brother Gentlemen. Bah! the creature

was but a *bourgeois*. Where were his pedigree and his letters-patent of nobility? In his books? We do not want any literary hacks among Us! One youthful Gentleman of the Chamber, noble, but very uncertain as to his spelling, wrote to his uncle that the appointment of 'ce Voltere' was a 'dezoneur' to gentlemen of name and arms, and the King really should have known better. The naïve youth consulted his 'respeque-table oncle' as to whether it would not be best for the Chamber to refuse to receive 'this Person named Arouet.' But at a very early date this Person named Arouet showed himself more than a match for the noble young gentleman and all his brethren at once.

Talking of the coming marriage of a lord's daughter with a Farmer-General—that synonym for dishonesty and extortion—one of the Gentlemen inquired where the pair would be married. 'At the tax-office,' suggested someone. 'There is no chapel there,' said another. 'Pardon me, gentlemen,' said Voltaire, who hitherto had not spoken a word, 'there is the Chapel of the Impenitent Thief.'

It may be guessed that the Gentlemen of the Chamber at least learnt to respect a brother with such a killing tongue.

He passed the early months of 1747 busy with his Travenol lawsuit, taking patent pills which he was always warmly recommending to Frederick, and 'making his court' to Madame de Pompadour. On July 2 he was congratulating the Minister of War on the French victory of Lawfeld; which he afterwards celebrated in an epistle, not at all equal to his 'Fontenoy.'

He had now reached the climax of his favour. The Historiographer of France, the Gentleman of the

Chamber, and the favourite of the mistress, may well have seemed a fixture at Court.

He was not sorry to escape from it on August 14 for a few days' visit to the Duchesse du Maine, now at Anet. Voltaire must have altered greatly since he was first her guest as a promising boy of twenty-one, two-and-thirty years ago. The promise had become fulfilment. Once, he had been honoured in being the Duchess's visitor; now, she was honoured in being his hostess. She allowed him to bring Madame du Châtelet with him because he would by no means have been allowed to come without her. The Duchess was still the 'sublime personage' Voltaire remembered. With her haughty and imperious temper, her brilliant grace and wit, her stately courtesy, and her magnificent condescension, she was the living type of those women who went later to the guillotine, scornful to the last of the *canaille* that brought them there—the women who lived so ill, and died so well. A little deformed was the great Duchess: very small; fair-haired; loving amusement and hating boredom above everything in this world and the world to come; seventy years old, but as appreciative of a Voltaire as she had been at forty.

With her was Madame de Staal, formerly Mademoiselle de Launay, whom Voltaire already knew; half maid, half companion, very observant and with a brilliant, satirical pen, much in use for writing famous Memoirs and recounting the gossip of the Maine court to Madame du Deffand in Paris.

There were various other visitors. The Duchess liked society, she said, because everybody had to listen to her and she had to listen to nobody.

Play-acting was much in vogue. Cleverness was



*de rigueur*. To be moral was unnecessary—but to be a bore, that was not to be dreamt of. It was upon this Court that the erratic Émilie, with her lover and a great quantity of luggage in her train, descended very late on the evening of the day before she was expected.

There was a fine fuss, according to the acid, elderly de Staal. The pair wanted supper. One of the visitors had to give up his bed to Madame du Châtelet, who complained of it the next morning. She tried two other rooms, and grumbled at *them*. She was determined, as usual, to carry on her studies, and required a bedroom where she could have silence, not so much by night, as by day. She shut herself up there and worked hard at Newton, joining the other visitors only in the evenings. Sublimely indifferent to social obligations was the Marquise. The stupid rules which govern guests in most polite societies she ignored entirely. She preferred work to tittle-tattling with the other women; so she worked. There were not enough tables in her room for her papers, her jewels, and her *pompons*; so she made a foraging expedition round the house and appropriated six or seven for her use. Anyone with a taste for occupation, and condemned to polite idleness, will understand and sympathise with Madame du Châtelet. It is also easy to understand that the old Duchess, who invited her guests solely to amuse herself, was offended. And that Voltaire, whose own passion for work kept him shut up alone almost as much as Émilie, felt it necessary to atone for their conduct by writing the Duchess lovely, gallant verses, and when he *did* appear, by being delightfully amusing and agreeable.

In a few days the company began to rehearse



Voltaire's farce 'Boursouffle,' which had formed the amusement of a Cirey evening nine years before. Madame du Châtelet took a part and would not submit, wrote the acrimonious de Staal, to the simplicity of costume it demanded, but persisted in dressing it like a Court lady.

She and Voltaire had a passage of arms on the point, de Staal added. 'But she is the sovereign, and he the slave;' and of course the slave had to submit. It is noticeable here, again, that it was the other women who abused Émilie, and not Émilie the other women. Perhaps her eternal Newton, at which they sneered, kept her from the meanness and the backbiting which disfigured their own conduct. Let her sublime inconsideration for other people's feelings and her childish fondness for fine clothes be granted. Those failings were common to most of the great ladies of the eighteenth century, and, no doubt, to Émilie's detractors among them. Her passion for work and her noble intellectual endowments were her own alone.

'Boursouffle' was an immense success. Voltaire and Madame took leave of the Duchess on August 25, 1747, the morning after its performance, and in their usual confusion of bandboxes, chiffons, and papers, left 'Boursouffle' behind them. The de Staal, whose temper was no doubt rendered uncertain by her post of polite maid-of-all-work to all the Duchess's guests, received agonised letters from Voltaire imploring her to send the farce by a safer means than the post, for fear it should be copied, and to keep the list of characters 'under a hundred keys.' He and Madame were back at Court again—with the sun of kingly favour shining on them, it seemed,

as brightly as ever. Six weeks passed without any distinguishing events. On October 14, 1747, the Court was at Fontainebleau, and Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet, its constant attendants, still staying at the house of the Duke of Richelieu in the same place.

## CHAPTER XVII

## COURT DISFAVOUR, AND HIDING AT SCEAUX

IT was one of the very doubtful privileges of Madame du Châtelet's rank that she was permitted to play cards at the Queen's table. Émilie had never done anything in moderation in her life. She not only loved, worked, and dressed to excess, but she gambled to excess also. High play was in the air of that eighteenth century. In England, as well as in France, men lost an estate or a fortune in an evening, and women staked the diamonds on their breast and the dowries of their children.

The thrifty Voltaire regarded the dangerous craze in Madame du Châtelet with not a little apprehension. He had known poverty not by name, but in person; and had no desire to renew the acquaintance.

One night at Fontainebleau, probably at the end of October 1747, but the actual date is not quite clear, Émilie lost four hundred louis. She must have exerted all her power over the man who had ceased to love her, but not to fear her or to be faithful to her, to make him lend her two hundred more. She played again the next evening, and lost those. One can fancy the scene—the crowded ante-chamber of royalty; the flushed and excited players; lights, laughter, and talk; Émilie, desperate and breathless, forgetting alike

her fine clothes which were the sign she was but as other women, and her cool reason which set her far above them—and at her side, Voltaire, urging her in fervent English whispers to come away, that the game was played, and the loss must be accepted with a shrug of the shoulders and as good a grace and philosophy as one could muster.

A fly buzzing at her ear could not have moved her less. The intoxication of play was upon her. She sent out and raised from her man of business and a friend, Mademoiselle du Thil, three hundred and eighty louis more. She lost them. Luck had been against her. It *must* turn now! She played on and on. At last she owed eighty-four thousand francs. The quick Voltaire at her elbow, robbed of all prudence and discretion (to be sure, he never had much of either), bent over her desperately at last and said in an agitated whisper in English: ‘Don’t you see you are playing with cheats?’ The words were hardly out of his mouth before he realised that they had been overheard and understood: or before one of the quickest intelligences that ever man had, had decided on action. Madame du Châtelet, sobered suddenly, was herself far too clever not to see the danger of the situation. The pair rose at once and left the palace. The room was full of their enemies: noble Gentlemen-in-Ordinary jealous of a brother whose pedigree was his brain and who had no birthright but genius: and women angry with Émilie for her absurd airs of youth, and her passion for learning which must be affected in *her*, because it certainly would be affected in *us*!

Would the Pompadour’s patronage save her brilliant protégé? By no means. The play was at the Queen’s table; and the silent Queen had no reason to love the



Pompadour's friends. Historiographer of France and Member of the French Academy—even that would not save a Voltaire, with a Voltaire's record behind him, from the consequences of such an utterance as this.

The two returned post-haste to Richelieu's house where they had their quarters. It was half-past one in the morning. They waited for nothing. The horses were put to at once. Longchamp was sent in search of their servants who were lodging at different houses in the place. Émilie's *femme de chambre* had only time to throw together a few packages of chiffons. She, Voltaire, and Émilie got into the carriage just as the October day was breaking. Longchamp was left behind to pack. The carriage was driven towards Paris, and the desperate pair within hastily sketched in the details of their scheme of action. A wheel of the carriage broke when they were near Essore, and the wheelwright, who had no mind to be cheated of his dues even by fine folk in gala attire, declined to let the carriage proceed till his bill was paid. Neither Voltaire nor Émilie had a single sou. A *lettre de cachet* and the Bastille loomed much too close for delays to be endurable. Luckily, an old acquaintance of the du Châtelets, coming by post-chaise from Paris, recognised Madame and paid the wheelwright. They drove on. At a little village near Paris, Voltaire alighted. Madame proceeded to the capital. It had been arranged that there she should make arrangement for the payment of her gambling debts, and if possible smooth the way for Voltaire's return. She was used to that office.

From a wayside inn Voltaire wrote to the Duchesse du Maine, now hard by at Sceaux; and sent the letter

by messenger. He had asked his old friend for hiding, shelter, refuge, till the storm blew over. She responded, telling him to come that night to the château, where one Duplessis, known to Voltaire, would meet him and conduct him to the rooms she was keeping for him. He did as she said. He entered the house unknown to any save Duplessis and the Duchess.

For not less than a month he lived in those rooms on the second floor, with the shutters barred night and day. Longchamp joined him there, bringing luggage, books, and papers. All day long the master wrote and the valet copied. Voltaire never slept more than five or six hours; but wrote, wrote, wrote by that eternal candle-light. At two o'clock every night, when the rest of the house was asleep, he came softly downstairs into the Duchess's bedroom, where the little, great lady was already in bed and where, propped on pillows, she royally waited to be amused by her guest. She was never disappointed. A servant, the only one in her confidence, brought M. de Voltaire a little supper which he ate on a little table between his hostess's bed and the wall. The valet left the room. During the meal the old Duchess told her visitor the most delightful wicked stories of the court of Louis XIV.—from her own experience. And then, M. de Voltaire produced a manuscript and read to the Duchess the charming result of his imprisonment—those miniature master-pieces of romance, 'Zadig,' 'Scarmentado,' 'Micro-mégas,' and 'Babouc.'

Only children of that astonishing eighteenth century could have enacted such a scene entirely without awkwardness, self-consciousness, or exaggeration. It was worth days of labour and darkness to find a listener as acute, as sympathetic and intelligent as

this little old woman who had lived so fully and knew human nature to the core.

While this lean M. de Voltaire with his startlingly brilliant eyes, and the sardonic mouth and drooping hook-nose more nearly meeting year by year—his conversation alone could turn night into day, and make one forget that such things as fatigue, ennui, sleep, are part of man's portion. Out of gratitude for her goodness—gratitude was never a virtue he lacked—he was wittier now than ever. Gratitude guided his pen as well as his speech and made his stories the most easy, graceful, and delightful in the world.

Voltaire had not been a romancer hitherto. He did not find it in him to invent plots now. 'Zadig' is founded on a story by English Thomas Parnell; and 'Micromégas' pretty openly taken from Cyrano de Bergerac's 'Journey to the Moon.' But as the 'amazing genius' of Shakespeare took the stillborn children of lesser men's brains and breathed on them the breath of life, so did Voltaire. Everything that makes a story immortal is his own in those matchless *contes*. Charm, wit, delicacy, an exquisite lightness of touch, the finest taste in satire, humour, variety, epigram, gaiety—with that ever-present undercurrent of biting meaning—almost all the Voltairian gifts are here. Every story is a pungent satire on the King, court, *régime*, or religion of that evil day. The characters are very palpably drawn from life. In 'Zadig' there is one Yebor who could by no possibility be anyone else than Boyer, the Âne of Mirepoix.

The graceless old Duchess, sitting up in bed, thoroughly enjoyed hearing her order castigated. She laughed loud and long to see how this Voltaire always had his whip on the raw.



No wonder she was eager for the tales to be given to the larger public of her court. The imprisonment was becoming wearisome. The unlucky Longchamp was ennuied to death. Voltaire's health began to suffer for want of light and fresh air. The secret of his whereabouts had been kept so well, that his enemies at Court supposed him to be on the road to Frederick and Berlin.

Everybody was glad when one fine day, probably about the end of November, Madame du Châtelet appeared with the news that the storm had blown over, that the unlucky utterance was more or less forgotten, and the gambling debts settled—somehow. The autocratic little Duchess was not going to part with her Voltaire now she might enjoy him openly. He and Madame du Châtelet joined her throng of gay satellites. There were comedies, operas, and balls. Voltaire, Émilie, and the de Staal all took parts in his play of 'The Prude,' imitated from Wycherley's 'Plain Dealer,' and now played for the first time—December 15, 1747. They acted 'Issé' by La Motte, 'Zélindor' by Moncrif, and 'Les Originaux,' a comedy by Voltaire, first performed at Cirey. Émilie took the part of *Issé*; was *Fanchon* in the 'Originaux,' and *Zirphé* in the opera of 'Zélindor.' If she *was* one-and-forty years old and *would* dress her parts, not to suit them, but her own love of finery, it must be confessed that she was matchlessly accomplished and versatile.

Voltaire, after the manner of the days when he was lover indeed, improvised gay verses of compliment to her. 'Madame du Châtelet,' he wrote to a friend, 'sang *Zirphé* correctly and acted with nobility and grace: a thousand diamonds were her least ornament.'



Besides play-acting there was an orchestra of marquises and viscounts. Dancers from the Opera amused the pleasure-loving little court. A delightful girl of thirteen carried that art to its highest perfection and charmed everyone with her grace and talent. And, in the bad quarter of an hour before dinner, Voltaire read the *contes* composed for the Duchess, to the Duchess's guests gathered together in the great salon.

The visit came to an end about the middle of December, when Voltaire had been at Sceaux about two months. Once more in Paris, he busied himself with a very pretty little *ruse*, by which he evaded the piracy of publishers and had two hundred private copies of 'Zadig' printed to give to the Duchess and her friends, before the rest of the world had read it.

Then came the pleasing news that on December 30 the 'Prodigal Son' had been played in the private apartments before the King by a distinguished company of amateurs; and that his Majesty had deigned to be amused. Amateur theatricals had a vogue only second to gaming in eighteenth-century France. To play the smallest parts in the feeblest piece in the King's presence, men and women made incredible sacrifices of fortune, of honour, and of truth. The Pompadour's *femme de chambre* obtained a commission in the army for one of her friends by procuring, for a duke, the very minor rôle of a policeman, who had only two lines in his part, in 'Tartuffe.' The clever Pompadour herself was an actress of no mean ability. She took a part in the 'Prodigal.' Voltaire had not been behindhand in encouraging her histrionic tastes. He does not appear to have been present at this performance of his comedy. When a play had already been performed in public (and 'The Prodigal Son,' it

will be remembered, was played, anonymously, in October 1736), it was not etiquette to invite its author to witness its *début* before royalty. But it pleased his bored Majesty so much that, on the strength of it, the Pompadour obtained for her brilliant Voltaire the delightful right and privilege of being henceforth always a spectator at the plays acted in the private apartments. And this unlucky Voltaire, in his enthusiasm and gratitude, must needs look among his papers and discover a poem, which, with a little artful alteration, will express his thanks to the mistress.

Nothing would ever have made Voltaire cautious. Audacity was in his nature, and there was no preventing it oozing out, like Bob Acres' courage, at the tips of his fingers whenever he got a pen in his hand. To be sure, if he had been circumspect he could not have been half so witty. If wit is not spontaneous, it is rarely wit at all. And this verse really would not have done him the slightest harm, if the favourite had but kept it to herself.

Every grace and charm and art,  
Pompadour, in you is found.  
And it is alike your part  
To be the treasure of one heart  
And a Court's delight.

So much blest, then, live for aye  
Lovely years with pleasure crown'd.  
The King brings peace with him. Oh may  
Your foes be nothing : and alway  
You both your conquests keep !

But, after all, though she was an astute, cool-blooded Pompadour, she was a woman too and loved a compliment ; and that her *entourage* should be aware she received such beautiful ones as that.

It soon reached the ears of poor Marie Leczinska, patient and dignified in the dreary and respectable seclusion of her apartments. The days were long gone when, a bride of one-and-twenty, she had called Voltaire 'my poor Voltaire' and pensioned him from her own purse. The ugly daughters, Mesdames, too, had still some influence over that dull sensual animal, their royal father, the King, and were not slow to use it.

Old Roy took occasion to sententiously point out in a dreary poem how abominable it was to allude to royal—mistakes : and how the loves of gods and kings were never meant for the comment of the vulgar. The unlucky Voltaire was further suspected at the moment of having been the author of some lines to the Dauphine, whose gay philosophy offended the King. He denied the authorship, of course, *in toto*. But that was very little use. It was whispered that Mesdames, the daughters, so worked upon Louis that he signed a decree of banishment for Voltaire, without even consulting the Pompadour. That would seem to have been an addition to make a good story better. There was most likely no edict of banishment on paper. Voltaire himself denied that there was ever any idea of such a thing. But on January 13, 1748, coming gaily to Versailles and not in the least anticipating any evil effect from the charming audacity of his verses, he found the Court too hot to hold him. He dined in Paris that night at a coffee-house, with a few other literary men. He arrived rather late. He had come straight from Versailles, and alone of the company knew what had occurred there. He made his dinner, after his frugal fashion, off seven or eight cups of black coffee and a couple of rolls, and was very talkative and amusing. The conversation turned on the newly

imposed tax on playing-cards, and on luxury. When the dinner was over other visitors at the coffee-house gathered round him and 'plied him with questions.'

He was not exiled. But he had committed an offence which made it expedient to go. He knew the Pompadour much too well to suppose she would put her position in jeopardy by trying to save a friend, even if he were a Voltaire. 'Circumspection is all very well,' he had once written to d'Argenson, 'but it is a melancholy thing in poetry: to be reasonable and cold is almost the same thing.' For his part, he would rather write even compliments and madrigals as he chose, and be banished for them, than remain at Court, tongue-tied and careful. If the Historiographership and the Academy and the solemn joy of signing oneself Gentleman-in-Ordinary to the King did not give one freedom, they were useless. Neither Voltaire nor Émilie had seen Cirey for many months. On the whole, it was best to go. They left Paris in the deep midwinter at nine o'clock on a January evening, 1748, with the snow thick on the ground and a temperature many degrees below freezing point.





MARIE LECZINSKA.

*From the Picture by Carl Van Loo in the Louvre.*



## CHAPTER XVIII

## THE MARQUIS DE SAINT-LAMBERT

ONE of Madame du Châtelet's idiosyncrasies was to travel only by night; and another, to overload the travelling carriage with luggage. She insisted on having her way in both particulars this time. It has been aptly said of Voltaire that he was at once patient and hasty. He certainly must have been patient to take the road with a woman whose packages frequently numbered a hundred and who could never travel without her lady's maid. That he usually lost his temper on such journeys, is simply to say that he was human.

On the present occasion, as they were nearing Nangis, the hind spring of the carriage broke, and the overladen vehicle fell over on the side of Voltaire. Madame du Châtelet, large and bony, the *femme de chambre* (whose weight and figure history does not record), and a vast quantity of band-boxes and parcels, came tumbling on the top of him. He relieved his feelings by uttering 'piercing shrieks.' Two footmen, by getting on the roof of the overturned carriage and dragging their mistress, the lady's maid, and the band-boxes up through the doors 'as from a well,' at last released M. de Voltaire in the same manner. It was bitterly cold and a brilliant starlight night. The two footmen, aided by the postillions, tried to set the

carriage straight again, and failed. One of the postillions rode on into the next village for further assistance. And Voltaire and Émilie sat by the roadside on the carriage cushions, and would have been 'perfectly happy' shiveringly studying astronomy, if they had only had a telescope. They *were* philosophers, after all.

The carriage was mended at last. But it had not gone fifty paces before it broke down again. The workmen, who considered Madame had underpaid them, had to be brought back by force—and promises. At last it was able to proceed at a walking pace the nine miles to the Château of Chapelle, where the travellers halted. They reached Cirey about the middle of January 1748 without further adventure.

The month they spent there was a gay one. Neither was anxious for too many *tête-à-têtes*. The honeymoon had set for ever. When they were alone, each wrote all day; in the evenings they read aloud together or played trictrac. Émilie had an aggravating habit of keeping her Voltaire waiting till supper was cold while she finished 'a little calculation.' That her Voltaire, himself orderly and punctual, was extremely *vif* at the delay need not be doubted. Madame du Deffand had once said that he followed Émilie like a faithful dog with the collar round his neck. Well, the dog was faithful still. But the collar irked and worried him; and there were times when he snapped at the hand that had put it there.

Madame de Champbonin reappeared on the scene very soon, with a hoydenish twelve-year-old niece in her train. She had been very warmly invited—if only to finish that solitude *à deux*. The whole neighbourhood received invitations presently to act in, or to



witness, theatricals. Émilie wrote charades for the occasion. She played comic parts as well as any other. Sometimes the servants were pressed into the cast and acted too. The *bonhomme* would seem to have been conveniently absent, as usual. Voltaire doubtless enjoyed the freedom of private life after the slavish etiquette of the Court. He was certainly able to enjoy theatricals to his last breath.

About the middle of February he and Madame went to visit another court, at Lunéville, where the etiquette was not slavish at all, and where a king was a great deal more anxious to have them than ever dull Louis had been.

Stanislas, once King of Poland, had been not a little thankful to exchange that quarrelsome and much quarrelled over kingdom for the peaceful little duchy of Lorraine, the tranquil enjoyment of a pipe six feet long, and the *dolce far niente* of his lazy and easy-going mistress, Madame de Boufflers. He still had the title of King. He still had a position—he was the father of Marie Leczinska. His miniature Court had all the pleasures and intrigues of a greater, with no weary formalism. Stanislas had his Jesuit, Menou, to rule him just as other kings had their priests to rule them. The priest fought the mistress for the command of the royal puppet, in the approved, courtly fashion; and the mistress fought the priest, when she was not too lazy.

The little Court was further ornamented by a child dwarf, who could sleep in a *sabot*, and a most beautiful young guardsman, six feet high.

Following the example of Frederick, Stanislas was a feeble author himself, and a very enthusiastic admirer of the literary Voltaire. The literary Voltaire was not

sorry to show the offended Court of France that he stood well with its offended Queen's royal father. So the visitors and the visited were gratified alike.

The visit was a gay one. 'Issé' was played; and 'Mérope,' when everyone sobbed just as they had done in Paris. In the evenings they played lansquenet or talked. It was an agreeable, idle life. Voltaire, ailing as usual, was humoured and made much of by the King. Émilie overwhelmed the inert and voluptuous Madame de Boufflers with her energetic friendship. And then—

The Marquis de Saint-Lambert is one of the most picturesque figures of his century. Poet and soldier, handsome, haughty and cold, with just enough disdain in his perfect manner to make every woman adore him and long to thaw that flawless ice—he had almost every quality which makes riches superfluous. He was, in fact, nothing but the officer of a company of Lorraine guards. He was much in Lunéville because he had, said the world, a fancy for his King's mistress, Madame de Boufflers. His own age accounted him celebrated because he wrote the loveliest drawing-room verses and was the author of a poem called 'The Seasons'—much duller than Thomson's. The present age only knows him as the man who robbed Rousseau of Madame d'Houdetot and Voltaire of Madame du Châtelet.

In 1738, when Madame de Graffigny, who was a friend of his, was at Cirey, she had corresponded with him. He had much wished to be asked to stay there. Since he knew how 'to read and rest in his own room during the day' and would only expect to be amused in the evenings, Madame du Châtelet desired to have him for a visitor. But the plan, probably owing to

the rupture with Madame de Graffigny, had never been carried out.

Madame du Châtelet was now two-and-forty years old, and, on the unanimous testimony of all her female friends, not at all beautiful. But that inflammable temperament, which years before had made her fling honour and prudence to the winds and give her heart and life to Voltaire, was hers still. Age had not quenched the fire. Abstruse thought and long devotion to the exact sciences had still left her, on one side of her nature, passionately a woman. Voltaire had passed quickly and easily from love to friendship—but not Émilie. Her jealousy of Frederick the Great was a proof that she loved her lover as he had long ceased to love her. As early as 1741, in Brussels, after his return from his second Prussian visit, she had bitterly reproached him with no longer caring for her. He had replied to her in verses of which the following give the keynote.

If you want me still to love  
Give me back love's golden morn;  
To the twilight of my days  
Join, forsooth, love's happy dawn.

Even the sunrise touches night.  
One hour is mine : and is no more.  
We pass : the race which follows us,  
Another follows : all is o'er.

In the year after he first met her, on the occasion of Richelieu's marriage to Mademoiselle de Guise, in April 1734, he had written

Love not too much : and so you may  
Love alway.  
For were it not the better far to be  
Friends for eternity  
Than lovers for a day ?



He had always been honest at least. If he had been still lover indeed, it might yet never have occurred to him that there could be cause for jealousy of Émilie of two-and-forty and a young guardsman of one-and-thirty.

When did that wild passion begin? Did it begin in those idle, early days of the Lunéville visit, gradually nourished by propinquity, that gay, easy life, those lovely society verses, and the tantalising fact that Saint-Lambert was a little bit in love with that stupid, lazy, self-indulgent de Boufflers? It would have been an irresistible temptation to Émilie's cleverness and energy to win away such a man from such a woman.

But it seems more likely that she had no time for designs, that she fell head over ears in love madly, recklessly, and at once—with that utter *abandon*, all foolish and half pathetic, with which an old woman too often loves a young man. Was it the handsome face and cold manner and heart that attracted her? The whole eighteenth century found them attractive. Saint-Lambert had so much, too, of that particularly vague quality called taste! He liked being amused, though he found it too much trouble to be amusing himself. And here was one of the cleverest women of her day, or of any day, who could not be dull if she tried and wanted nothing better than to entertain him. She must have been an invigorating change from the sleepy de Boufflers, at any rate. He was not sorry, too, to obtain the *cachet* which would accrue to him for having robbed a Voltaire.

But whether the passion on both sides was born full-grown, dominant, and irresistible, or had slower roots in vanity and idleness, matters not. It was soon an accomplished fact. Madame du Châtelet wrote her



Saint-Lambert the most mad, adoring letters on rose-coloured or sky-blue notepaper with an edge of lace. She put the letters in Madame de Boufflers' harp in the salon. And when everyone had gone to bed, the young guardsman came and found them there. He replied of course. If he did not adore, he graciously submitted to be adored. 'Come to me as soon as you are up,' wrote the deluded woman. And sometimes, secretly creeping round by the thickets of the garden, *she* would visit *him*. She hardly thought her conduct required apology. She loved him. That was enough. Or if it did, well then, for years Voltaire had been but her friend when he should have been her lover. 'I loved for both.' 'I had reason to complain and I forgave all.' She had tried to be satisfied with friendship: but she could not. She wrote thus to d'Argental in a letter not devoid of genuine feeling and even of pathos. She *had* some excuse. But she made the common mistake of thinking that an excuse and a justification are the same thing.

The Abbé Voisenon has recorded how once Madame du Châtelet, after, it may be guessed, a quarrel with Voltaire, spoke of herself as entirely alienated from him. The Abbé took down one of the eight volumes of Voltaire's manuscript letters to her and read some aloud. All his love letters contained, says the Abbé, more epigrams against religion than madrigals for his mistress. But when the reader stopped, Émilie's eyes were wet. She was not cured yet. A few years later, in 1749, her priestly friend tried the same experiment. She listened unmoved. She was cured indeed: and the doctor had been Saint-Lambert.

The Lunéville visit lasted from about February 1748 until the end of April. Then Madame du

Châtelet left the Court : and returned to Cirey, where she and Saint-Lambert may have spent a few blissful, uninterrupted days together. Voltaire prolonged his visit to Stanislas a short time. By May 15 he and Madame du Châtelet were both once more at Cirey *en route* for Paris.

During her stay at Lunéville the energetic Marquise had not only found a lover, but obtained for her *bonhomme* the lucrative post of the Grand Marshal of the Household to Stanislas, and a commission in the army for her son.

But her thoughts were not with husband, son, or friend (as she still called her Voltaire), but with M. de Saint-Lambert. Wherever she was she wrote to him continually—letters filled with passion, *abandon*, tenderness, bitterness, doubt. He had purposed taking a journey in Italy, but renounced it at her pleading. She thanked him with the melancholy effusion and the humiliating gratitude of the woman who has obtained from her master a sacrifice she knows to be unwilling. She and her unsuspecting Voltaire came up to Paris. If she spent her time writing to her lover, Voltaire spent his in superintending the rehearsals of his new tragedy ‘Semiramis.’ One day his versatility appeared in a new character, and he wrote a prologue for his ‘Death of Cæsar’ for a girls’ school who proposed to act it. It is characteristic of the man that he adapted himself to this entirely new *rôle* with the most perfect flexibility and thoroughness. The prologue’s chief characteristics are its ‘ease and orthodoxy.’ He wrote it leaning on a mantelpiece, on the spur of the moment. He included a charming little letter to the Sister Superior and even begged the prayers of that good lady on his behalf !

On June 28 he and Madame du Châtelet left Paris for Commercy, another seat of Stanislas, where that King then was.

Voltaire was ill and miserable and Madame a more impossible travelling companion than ever. On their route, at Châlons-sur-Marne, she must needs engage in the most vociferous, fatiguing dispute with the landlady of an inn over a basin of soup.

Commercy was as gay as Lunéville. There were the inevitable operas and comedies, and on July 14, Providence kindly arranged a total eclipse of the sun to further amuse the little Court. One of its number had astronomised ever so many years ago at Sceaux and at Villars: and had not forgotten those times.

On August 26 he returned to Paris, leaving Madame du Châtelet behind him. She did not complain of his neglect this time. King Stanislas also came up to Paris to stay for a few days with his daughter, the Queen. Voltaire arrived in the capital on the very day of the production of 'Semiramis'—probably August 29, 1748.

There had long been forming a cabal against the piece, headed by enemy Piron and joined by most of the adherents of that dismal old playwright Crébillon, who had himself written a clumsy 'Semiramis' in 1717. Well, conspiracy for conspiracy. What weapons you use against me, I have the right to use against you. That was Voltaire's theory now as ever. He met cunning with cunning. He bought up half the seats in the house. He gave them to persons who could be absolutely relied upon to clap and cry at the right moments, and to drown all hisses with applause. Theriot helped him. The d'Argental husband and wife had been already active on his behalf. Voltaire too



had boldly asked the patronage of King Louis and the Pompadour, and the King, in consideration of the piece having been originally written for the late Dauphine, agreed to pay the expenses of putting it on the stage. If the play but once had a hearing Voltaire believed that no conspiracy could damn it.

The little scheme succeeded fairly well. M. de Voltaire's friends wept and applauded to perfection. But the first three acts were received by the audience as a whole with only a very moderate warmth. And in the fourth, the play was nearly ruined. It was then the custom in France for the spectators to sit and walk about on the stage. During this fourth act, at a scene at the tomb of Ninus, there were so many of them, that the too enthusiastic player who took the part of the sentinel and was guarding the tomb, called out: 'Make way for the ghost, if you please, gentlemen. Make way for the ghost!' which set the house in a roar. The playwright, to be sure, had no reason to find the incident amusing. He complained to the Lieutenant of Police, and in future performances of 'Semiramis' the abuse was corrected.

That first night, then, was by no means so decidedly successful as its author had hoped.

On the second night, August 30, M. de Voltaire, wanting to hear what his friends as well as his enemies said of the piece behind his back, disguised himself and went to the famous Café Procope, opposite the Comédie Française, and largely frequented by literary and theatrical people. He had been an amateur actor to some purpose, and understood the art of make-up as well as any professional on the boards. With cassock and bands, an old three-cornered hat, and an



immense full-bottom unpowdered wig that showed hardly anything of his face except the sharp end of his long, pointed nose, he looked the part of an abbé to perfection. He put a breviary under his arm; arrived at the *café*; possessed himself of a newspaper; chose a dark corner; put on his spectacles, and read the paper over a modest repast of a cup of tea and a roll. The *café* filled presently—journalists, actors, some of the partisans of Crébillon and some of Voltaire—all fresh from the play and all anxious to air their views thereon. That sensitive, thin-skinned, long-nosed abbé in the corner had to exercise all his self-control to keep himself from contradicting an enemy who criticised unjustly, or a friend who praised foolishly. But he did it. The rôle pleased his sense of humour. And one or two of his critics quoted some of his fine passages not amiss. He sat there for an hour and a half, keenly attentive to the conversation. The result as a whole was not unsatisfactory. The play would do.

It ran for fifteen nights in succession. When a month or so later a vile parody appeared on it, Voltaire, supported by her father's friendship, begged Marie Leczinska to suppress that parody. But the Queen, remembering Voltaire not as the man whose 'Indiscret' and 'Mariamne' had charmed her youth, but as the imprudent friend of the Pompadour, coldly declined to interfere. The Pompadour herself could do little. But the parody did not much harm the original after all. On October 24, 1748, 'Semiramis' was performed at Fontainebleau and well received. The play is still of interest to English people—not for itself, but for the 'Advertisement' which precedes it: and which contains the most famous and

the most adverse criticism upon Shakespeare in the world. He was 'a drunken savage:' and 'Hamlet' 'a coarse and barbarous piece which would not be endured by the dregs of the people in France or Italy.' In his head 'Nature delighted to bring together the noblest imagination with the heaviest grossness.' This was Voltaire's most remarkable word on the great Englishman. But it was not his last.

Before 'Semiramis' was performed at Court Voltaire had returned to Lunéville. The excitements of Paris had been too much for him. From being always ailing, he was now really ill. Longchamp was his travelling companion. By the time they reached that unlucky Châlons, on September 12, Voltaire was in a high fever and compelled to take to his bed in a wretched post-house. Longchamp, seeing that his condition was critical (Voltaire never gave in to illness until he could neither stand nor speak), told the bishop and intendant of the place. They hastened to the patient and offered him hospitality, which he declined; and then they sent him a doctor. He listened to the professional advice very patiently. Long ago, at Cirey, Madame de Graffigny had noted his good humour and politeness in sickness: and recorded how he was grateful even for advice and prayers! His gratitude for advice fortunately did not extend to following it. On the present occasion he heard meekly and replied laconically when he was told he must be bled and swallow various violent and nauseous mixtures. But he was not bled and he did not take the medicines. Temperance and exercise in health, and abstinence and rest in illness, were the main principles of the system which he followed all his life. That with a wretched constitution and a fatal habit of taking too little sleep

and doing far too much brain work, he lived to be eighty-four at a period when the threescore years and ten of the Psalmist were accounted very old age, is a proof that his *régime* was not wholly a mistaken one.

On the present occasion he was so ill that he thought himself dying. But he still read and still dictated letters to Longchamp; though he was so weak he could only sign himself 'V.' After a few days on a self-imposed diet of tea, toast, and barley-water, the fever left him. He was far too feeble to stand. But he made Longchamp wrap him up in his dressing-gown and carry him into the post-chaise in which they proceeded towards Lunéville. He was still so ill that he travelled thirty miles without uttering a single word. Before this, unknown to him, Longchamp, who was very sincerely attached to him, had written to tell Madame du Châtelet and Madame Denis of his condition. Once, Émilie would have hastened to him, and half killed him with her vigorous, overwhelming affection and attentions. It was as well for his health that she was quite engrossed with her lover at Lunéville and simply sent a courier with a message.

That message cheered the sick man a little. If he was but her friend, he was her very faithful friend. And friendship meant much more to Voltaire than to most people.

He was better by the time he reached Lunéville. The urgent desire to get well as soon as possible, on that old principle that illness was a kind of degradation, may have helped his recovery.

Madame du Châtelet insisted upon his being cheerful because she felt so herself. He was soon fairly well again, and that miserable journey faded into a bad dream.



In the early part of the October of 1748, Stanislas, and his little Court with him, moved again to Commercy. The guilty loves of Madame du Châtelet and Saint-Lambert were still not even suspected by Voltaire. The guardsman, who soon resigned his commission to become Grand Master of Stanislas' Royal Wardrobe, seems to have been not a little embarrassed by the vehemence of Émilie's passion. But in exact proportion as he was cold, she was ardent. His letters to her have not survived; but from hers to him it is evident that while she was imprudent, headlong, and reckless, he was at least cool enough to see danger and discourage the maddest of her schemes.

The discovery of their secret was of course only a matter of time. One night early in that October of 1748 at Commercy, Voltaire walked into Madame du Châtelet's apartments, unannounced as his habit was, and there in a little room at the end of the suite, lighted by only one candle, he found the handsome young soldier and his clever, foolish, elderly mistress 'talking upon something besides poetry and philosophy.'



## CHAPTER XIX

## THE DEATH OF MADAME DU CHÂTELET

IF the invasion of Silesia by King Anti-Machiavelli-Frederick-the-Great had given Voltaire a moral shock difficult to recover from, he experienced a shock far greater in degree and kind now.

He had been slow to see anything. But when he did see, he saw all. He broke into the most passionate and violent reproaches. The lofty Saint-Lambert responded that no one had the right to criticise *his* conduct, and that if M. de Voltaire did not like it, he had better leave the château. The remark irritated Voltaire to a frenzy. Émilie stood by, nonplussed for once in her life, not at all ashamed, but in very considerable difficulty. One can fancy the half dark study, the abominably aggravating coolness of Saint-Lambert, and the inarticulate fury of Voltaire. He flung himself out of the room in one of the greatest passions of his life. He called Longchamp, said that he must beg, borrow, or steal a post-chaise, and make ready to start for Paris that very night. The artful valet went straight to Madame du Châtelet for an explanation. 'No post-chaise is to be found on any consideration,' said Émilie. An outcry would ruin her reputation. (It is inconceivable, but true, that Madame

du Châtelet considered her reputation as yet immaculate.) At two o'clock in the morning Longchamp came to his master's rooms and announced that a post-chaise was an impossibility. Then ride to Nancy at daybreak and get one ! M. de Voltaire's passion had not yet spent its force. He went to bed. And Longchamp crept down again to Madame du Châtelet. That marvellous woman was writing at her desk, and announced the extraordinary intention of going to see M. de Voltaire herself, then and there, and bring him to reason.

She did it. She took a seat on the end of his bed. She spoke to him in English, that old language of their quarrels and love, and by a tender name, long disused. Longchamp lit a couple of candles and retired—to listen to the conversation through the wall. It was the most marvellous conversation in the world. They spoke in French now. Émilie tried to excuse herself—somehow. The lean, furious, exhausted, unhappy man in bed started up.

'Believe you !' he cried. 'Now ! I have sacrificed health and fortune for you, and you have deceived me.'

And Émilie proceeded to explain with a perfect plainness of speech that Voltaire had long ceased to love her as a lover, and that since she *must* love someone, he should be pleased that her choice had fallen on a mutual friend, like M. de Saint-Lambert.

How the piercing eyes in the thin face on the pillow must have looked her through and through ! Voltaire answered with a very fine irony : 'Madame, you are always right ; but if things must be so, do not let me see them.'

Before she left him, she embraced him. She had succeeded in her aim so far that he was calmer.

The rest of the night the energetic woman spent

in appeasing Saint-Lambert, who considered Voltaire had insulted him.

Voltaire was ill in bed the next day. It must be allowed he had an excuse for illness this time. And behold! as the evening drew in, the young Marquis comes in person to make inquiries after the invalid's health, and the invalid admits him. Saint-Lambert makes very handsome apologies for the hasty words which had escaped him in a moment of agitation. Voltaire takes him by both hands and embraces him. '*Mon enfant*, I have forgotten all. It was I who was wrong. You are at the happy age of love and pleasure. Make the most of both.'

The very next day the three met at supper at Madame de Boufflers', and all enjoyed themselves immensely. All idea of the post-chaise and Paris was dismissed. Did Voltaire recall that gay episode of his youth when he and de G  nonville had shared the smiles of Mademoiselle de Livri?

In 1749 he actually wrote Saint-Lambert a beautiful gallant poem on the event which had for the time being so much disturbed his peace:

Saint-Lambert, it is all for thee  
The flower grows:  
The rose's thorns are but for me:  
For thee, the rose—

and went on to say in flowing couplets how the 'astro-nomic   milie' had renounced mathematics and inky fingers for those 'beautiful airs which Love repeats and Newton never knew.'

By October 17 the ex-lover, the lover, and the mistress had returned to Lun  ville with Stanislas' Court (of which Voltaire justly complained as being 'a little

ambulant') on terms of perfect amity. The whole episode had occupied only a few days. And presently Voltaire was once more engrossed heart and soul in his 'History of Louis XV.'

The explanation of his conduct lies, as ever, in character.

He was angry at first because he had an uncommonly quick temper and a great provocation. But he was always a philosopher as he grew calmer. It was a very bad world. That was his lifelong conviction. So much the more reason to make the best of it! He had lost a selfish, irritating, and *exigeante* mistress. But there was no reason why he should not keep a clever woman for a friend. Émilie had, after all, but acted on a principle which was his as well as hers; that, in the relation of the sexes, when duty ceases to be a pleasure, it ceases to be a duty also. (It is but just to Voltaire and to Madame du Châtelet to say that they did not carry this remarkable theory, not yet out of vogue, into any other department of morals.)

The age looked upon such irregularities simply as subjects for a jest or an epigram. And every man sees in some degree with the eyes of the time in which he lives.

So Voltaire wrote 'Louis XV.' The pain passed, as sharp pains are apt to do, quickly. He and Madame du Châtelet, unaccompanied by Saint-Lambert, left Lunéville for Cirey about December 20, 1748. The journey was very like a hundred they had made in old times. At that fatal Châlons, Émilie *would* call on the bishop and keep the post-horses waiting the whole day while she played cards, and Voltaire lost his temper with her just as if he had been her lover still. Once at



Cirey, he was engrossed in hard work, and she wrote a preface to her Newton when she was not writing love letters to Saint-Lambert. Her infidelity would hardly have altered the course of her life were it not for that rigorous law that 'every sin creates its own punishment.'

The events that followed are such as are best passed over in the fewest words possible. In this December of 1748 at Cirey, Madame du Châtelet found that she was again to be a mother. Saint-Lambert was summoned. He, Voltaire, and the unhappy woman consulted together on what course they would take. Émilie was in tears at first; and they all ended in laughter. They decided on a daring comedy. The Marquis—that simple *bonhomme*—was summoned home, fêted, caressed—and deceived. It is sufficient to say that he was delighted with his wife's prospects, and thought he had reason to be so delighted. He left Cirey, spreading the good news abroad. And Madame du Châtelet complacently considered that her reputation was saved.

Nothing damns the eighteenth century deeper than the fact that this loathsome story was its darling anecdote; and that his criminal connection with Madame du Châtelet, and the sinister events which were its consequence, made Saint-Lambert the very height of fashion. Every memoir of the period has the tale in detail. Longchamp gloats over it. The fine ladies of Paris made *mots* upon it, of which in our day a decent bargee would be ashamed. If the French Revolution immolated some of the very persons who brought it about, was the injustice so gross? A Voltaire shared the vices of the social conditions he condemned, and was himself in some sort a part of that system which set

itself above decency and duty and which he knew to be fatal to the good of mankind.

He came out of this unclean comedy less smirched than the other actors therein. But that is to say very little. To be a part of it at all was defilement enough.

By February 17 of the new year 1749 Voltaire and Émilie were installed in the Rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré in Paris.

The *bonhomme* had rejoined his regiment. Saint-Lambert was in attendance at Lunéville.

Voltaire had written a 'Panegyric of Louis XV.' which was to be recited to his Majesty by Richelieu when the Academy went in a body on February 21 to offer their congratulations to the King upon the establishment of peace. But, as so often happened with Voltaire's writings, the thing had become public too soon. Friend Richelieu, enraged at hearing his recitation being murmured and quoted by the courtiers about him, would not recite it at all. Voltaire was not present on the occasion. When he heard what Richelieu had done, he flung his old friend's portrait into the fire in a rage.

March 10 saw a brief revival of 'Semiramis': but all the same it was the fashion just now to prefer Crébillon and his 'Catilina.'

On May 27 Voltaire obtained the privilege of selling his useless post of Gentleman-in-Ordinary, while he was allowed to retain its title. But privilege or no privilege, he did not stand well at Court. King Stanislas had written a work called the 'Christian Philosopher'; in which his good daughter, Queen Marie Leczinska, saw, disapprovingly, the free-thinking influence of Voltaire. He still courted the Pompadour;

but no Pompadour ever yet imperilled her own position for any friend in the world.

Another king and court were, indeed, particularly anxious that Voltaire should return to them, but Voltaire refused Frederick's invitation firmly. He *was* really ill, as he said. But there was another reason. He had resolved not to leave Madame du Châtelet until the dark hour that was coming upon her had passed.

They fell, even in Paris, into their old habit of hard work. Émilie worked to kill thought, to stifle a dreadful foreboding which was with her always. She studied mathematics with Clairaut, who had once visited Cirey and was 'one of the best geometricians in the universe.' She shut herself up with him for hours and hours, resolving problems. She plunged into all kinds of gaiety. Her letters to Saint-Lambert are the letters of a very unhappy woman—tortured with jealousy and doubts, *exigeante*, fearful, unquiet. He was true to her—and cold. She tried to thaw his ice at the fire of her own passion. 'I do not even love Newton,' she wrote; 'only you. But it is a point of honour with me to finish my work.'

One day, she and Clairaut were so engrossed in their labours, that Voltaire, whose philosophy never could endure being kept waiting for meals, bounded up from the supper table, ran upstairs 'four steps at a time,' found the door locked and smashed it in with his foot in a rage. 'Are you in league to kill me?' he cried as he went down again, followed by the too-zealous mathematicians who had the grace to be ashamed of themselves. There was a very cross, silent supper *à trois*. The next morning Madame du Châtelet, feeling she owed her friend a reparation, suggested



that she should take her morning coffee in his rooms. She did so, out of a priceless porcelain cup and saucer, which Voltaire, whose temper was still rather irritable, broke by a clumsy movement. Madame reproached him sharply. He retaliated. He grumbled a good deal at the exorbitant sum he had to pay to replace the *bric-à-brac*. Both he and Émilie were at the end of their tether. Yet they were good to each other. Émilie felt she owed Voltaire much for his pardon, and his reasonableness. And Voltaire never appears even to have thought that her faithlessness as his mistress could exonerate him from fidelity to her as his friend. He knew that she was unhappy. Compassion was in his nature. It is that quality which made him to the last hour of his life, in spite of his gibes and cynicisms, something more than commonly lovable.

In April, Stanislas had come up for a fortnight to the French Court. The unhappy Marquise had then been able to make arrangements for a future sojourn at Lunéville, of great importance to her: and of which she wrote, eagerly and feverishly, to Saint-Lambert.

Voltaire was now writing a play, 'Nanine'—founded on Richardson's 'Pamela.' When it was produced on June 16, 1749, he had followed his old plan of filling the house as much as possible with his friends. There were a few spectators in the gallery, however, who would talk aloud. The nervous and sensitive author could by no means endure *that*. Up he got on to his feet. 'Silence, you boors, silence!' he cried; and silent they were. Whenever he saw his own plays he found it impossible to contain himself. He not only trained the actors beforehand; but he must lead the laughter



and the tears of the *parterre* at the performance. And, to be sure, if there *is* anyone who should know where a play is pathetic and where it is comic, it is the man who wrote it.

He and Émilie were in Paris from February until the end of June. Frederick repeated his invitation warmly. 'You are not a *sage-femme* after all,' he wrote to Voltaire scornfully, 'and Madame will get on very well without you.' Any sarcasm penetrated Voltaire's thin skin. But he replied gravely, 'Not even Frederick the Great can now prevent me fulfilling a duty I believe to be indispensable. I am neither doctor nor nurse, but I am a friend and will not leave, even for your Majesty, a woman who may die in September.'

He was true to his word. Late in June, while 'Nanine' was still running, he and Madame du Châtelet went to Cirey at her urgent desire. When they were there, the most versatile of human creatures, the author of the 'Pucelle' and the prim prologue for a girls' school, wrote at her request a eulogy of Saint-Louis, and a very good eulogy too, for an abbé who had to deliver one before the Academy and could by no means compose it himself.

It was at Emilie's desire, too, that they left Cirey, after only a fortnight's stay there—'these delightful rooms, books and liberty, to go and play at comets' at Lunéville. A few days at Commercy had preceded their stay at Lunéville, which they reached on July 21, 1749. It was there that Madame would find Saint-Lambert. It was there that the event which she dreaded more every day was to take place. Voltaire was not only sick to death of that wearisome mockery of astronomy with which Stanislas' little Court was

still amusing itself, but was further annoyed by being very uncomfortable and ill-attended to in his rooms in which he shut himself up as much as he could. He bore the discomfort—not at all in silence indeed—but he bore it.

A quarrel on the subject with Alliot, who was commissioner-general of the household of Stanislas, and a very economical commissioner too, burst out on August 29, and Voltaire relieved his feelings in some *vif* little notes: one of which he addressed to the King himself, and besought his Majesty to remedy the defects in the meals, lighting, and firing supplied to his guest. Émilie, who had so urgent a reason for remaining at Lunéville, did her clever best to soothe her *ami*. He *was* soothed apparently.

Meanwhile the little Court went its usual way. Madame de Boufflers was her smiling, easy self—that *dame de volupté* ‘who,’ as she said in her epitaph, ‘for greater security, made her Paradise in this world.’ There were also the austerer, priestly influences trying to gain Stanislas. Poetry was a fashion among the guests and the courtiers, as also the inevitable play-acting. Saint-Lambert was still at work on that lengthy poem, ‘The Seasons.’ The summer was waning. Émilie plunged into every excess of gaiety, and every excess of work. She forgot that she was three-and-forty, not three-and-twenty. To forget everything—that was her aim—to have no time to think of past or future. His duties often called Saint-Lambert away to Nancy, and when he was absent the wretched woman endured torments of loneliness, helplessness, and foreboding. He reassured her when he was there. He was always so calm! As September drew near

she sent for Mademoiselle du Thil from Paris, that ill-advised friend of hers, once her lady-companion, who on one memorable occasion had lent her money—to lose at the Queen's table. The *bonhomme* appeared on the scene. Voltaire was writing constant letters to his friends, anticipating the coming event gaily. Madame had a herculean constitution. All would be well! She was still constantly at her desk. She employed many hours in doing up her manuscripts and letters in parcels, and giving Longchamp directions as to the persons who were to receive them—if—if——. It was a point of honour with her, as she had said, to finish Newton. On August 30, 1749, she wrote her last letter to Saint-Lambert. 'I am wretched to a degree which would frighten me if I believed in presentiments,' she said.

On September 4 Voltaire was writing delightedly to announce the birth of a little girl and the well-being of the mother. The infant was sent straight into the village to be nursed, and in the stress of the painful events which followed, died almost unnoticed. Madame du Châtelet progressed favourably. The little Court was in the highest spirits and spent most of its time in her room. On September 9, the weather being exceedingly hot, the patient asked for an iced drink. It was given her and she was seized with convulsions.

Stanislas' physician hastened to her and for the moment she seemed better. The next day, September 10, the convulsions returned: and two doctors from Nancy were called in. The Marquise again appeared better. In the evening Voltaire and the Marquis du Châtelet went down to supper with Madame de Boufflers—still not the least anticipating any danger.



Longchamp, Saint-Lambert, and Mademoiselle du Thil were left in the room with the sick woman. Eight or ten minutes later, they heard a rattle in her throat. They did what they could. Mademoiselle hastened downstairs to tell Voltaire and the Marquis. The horrified supper party hurried to the bedroom and a scene of dreadful confusion ensued. Madame du Châtelet was already quite unconscious. No one had time to think 'of priest, of Jesuit, or of Sacrament.' But the Marquise was past their help. 'She knew none of the horrors of death,' wrote Voltaire. 'It was her friends who felt those.'

His own anguish of spirit, when the dreadful truth was borne in upon him, rendered him beside himself. He and Saint-Lambert remained by the bed awhile. And then Voltaire, who had loved his mistress longer and better than his supplanter, dragged himself away, blind and dull with misery. He stumbled at the foot of the staircase without, and when Saint-Lambert, who had followed, would have helped him, Voltaire turned upon him with a bitter reproach. Its terms are so unrepeatable that the eighteenth century repeated them *ad nauseam*: and the twentieth may as well forget them if it can.

The brief remainder of that fatal day Voltaire spent in writing the bitter news to his friends.

If any proof be needed of the vehemence and sincerity of his feeling for the dead woman, those letters give it.

The next day Madame de Boufflers took from the Marquise's ring a portrait of Saint-Lambert and bade Longchamp give the ring to the Marquis du Châtelet. A little later Voltaire asked Longchamp for the ring in



question. Thirteen years before, he had given Émilie his own portrait for it, with these lines,

Bavier 'graved this likeness for you.  
 Recognise it, and his art.  
 As for me, a greater Master  
 Has engraved you—on my heart.

His portrait had displaced one of the Duke of Richelieu's—and now his, in its turn, had made way for Saint-Lambert's.

Voltaire might well turn away saying that all women are alike; and trying to comfort himself with the antique and barren reflection that, after all, it was the way of the world.

Among Madame du Châtelet's effects was a large parcel of letters. She left a memorandum to beg her complaisant husband to burn them unread. 'They can be of no use to him and have nothing to do with his affairs.' He did so, on his brother's prudent advice. But Longchamp observed him make a very wry face at certain ones of which, being uppermost, he caught sight. The cautious valet rescued from the flames the whole of Voltaire's 'Treatise on Metaphysics' and some letters, afterwards also burnt. Among the destroyed manuscripts were historical notes of Voltaire's, whose loss he deplores in his preface to his 'Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations.' It has been thought, but is not certain, that the whole of his eight volumes of letters to Madame du Châtelet also perished in this conflagration. If they did not, a new Voltaire, a new world, rich in human interest, as no doubt in wit and philosophy, still remains to be discovered by some literary Columbus. At present, of all the letters he wrote to her, the human being

with whom he was most intimate and who shared the deepest secrets of his soul and the highest aspirations of his genius, there can be found but one gay little note.

Madame du Châtelet was buried with all honour at Lunéville. Paris had already flayed her dead body with epigrams. She had not been too immoral for its taste. That was impossible. But she had been far too clever. One indignant person said that it was to be hoped the cause of her death would be the last of her airs. 'To die in childbed at her age is to wish to make oneself peculiar: it is to pretend to do nothing like other people.' Frederick the Great wrote her epitaph. 'Here lies she who lost her life in giving birth to an unfortunate infant and a treatise on philosophy.' Maupertuis and Marmontel spoke of her in terms of warm admiration. And Voltaire prefixed to her translation of Newton, published in 1754, at once the kindest and the truest estimate of her character yet made.

Madame du Châtelet was intellectually a very great woman. She had a mind essentially clear and logical—the mind of a clever man. She had not only a passion for learning rare in her sex, but for exactly the kind of learning in which her sex generally fails. She had, too, an intellectual fairness strangely unfeminine. She was long the champion of Leibnitz against Newton; and then, convinced of her mistake, acknowledged it, and made it the business of her life to prove it and to translate and explain Newton for the benefit of the French people. In an age busily idle, she was distinguished by a noble and untiring industry. In an age of scandal, she was charitable. For all those terrible fine clothes and that passion for

high play and taking youthful parts in amateur theatricals, the laugh of the de Staals and the du Deffands at her expense turns against them now.

Still preserved among her letters are her 'Reflections on Happiness.' She plainly avows there that 'rational self-indulgence' was her idea of it. Upon that rock her barque split. She chose pleasure before duty and gained a faithless Richelieu, fifteen jealous, feverish years with Voltaire, and a wretchedness from the cool love of the lofty Saint-Lambert, of which every letter she wrote him is proof.

Out of the picture painted by Loir there still looks down the shrewd, smiling face—reflective eyes, clever forehead, mobile lips, drooping nose—of the woman who was at once Voltaire's curse and blessing—who, if she had been all good might have been his blessing only, and if she had been all bad, would have been curse alone. At the Revolution, some wretches broke open her coffin to steal the lead.

There had been gold in her heart once, but the world and the flesh had overlaid it in dross.

## CHAPTER XX

## PARIS, 'ORESTE' AND 'ROME SAUVÉE'

THE death of Madame du Châtelet marks one of the great epochs of Voltaire's life.

For a while he was utterly crushed and broken. He wrote of himself to his friends as the most wretched of men. He was alone, abandoned, dying. Everything that made life worth having had been taken from him—and he would live no longer.

There is not the slightest doubt that he felt passionately every word he wrote, and that he suffered wretchedly. It was characteristic of his nation and himself to give grief words. It was characteristic of himself to remember nothing but good of that 'friend of twenty years' who had been taken from him. He recalled Cirey and the springtime of their passion, and forgot Lunéville and Saint-Lambert. He remembered the woman of a splendid intellect and a most just judgment: who was learned without affectation of learnedness; who had 'the genius of Leibnitz, with feeling;' and the literary style of a Pascal or a Nicole. He remembered 'her imperial sympathy' and not her 'shrewish temper.' 'The *pompons* and the world are of her age, and her merit is above her age, her sex, and ours,' he had written to the Abbé de Sade in 1733. He thought that now. Her brilliant and ready under-



standing of his philosophies, thoughts, aims, came back to him overwhelmingly. She had sinned against him in the flesh. Her mind had been his for ever.

It would indeed have been impossible but that a fifteen years' connection with such a woman as Madame du Châtelet should have had lifelong effects upon a character so impressionable as Voltaire's. Her relentless logic and her passion for hard facts did a work, and a good work, upon his vivid, sensitive, bantering, and versatile intelligence. She added correctness to a style which has no equal in the world for interest, gaiety, and satire. She forced him to sound the depths his matchless sparkle hid, to examine first principles, to advance step by step in argument with the stern accuracy of a Euclid.

From his acquaintance with her he formed his conviction of the mental equality of women with men. In his first grief at her loss, says Longchamp, he wrote of her :

The world has lost her ! She, sublime, who, living  
Loved pleasures, arts, the truth. The gods in giving  
Her their soul and genius, kept but for their own  
That immortality which is for gods alone.

Voltaire denied the verses. He was in no mood for making mediocre rhymes, he said. But in 1754 he certainly *did* write that noble eulogy of her which forms the preface to her translation and commentary of Newton, and never afterwards spoke of her—and he spoke of her often—but in terms of a reverent and a passionate admiration.

For the first few days his grief was overwhelming. King Stanislas was full of compassion, and three times a day mingled his tears with the mourner's.

Lunéville was now naturally horrible to Voltaire. He thought of going to stay with a certain priestly friend at the Abbey of Senones. Perhaps he would go back to England! He would have preferred the grave—or thought he would have preferred it—to either of these alternatives. About September 14, 1749, he ended by accompanying the Marquis du Châtelet to Cirey.

It is not difficult to realise that such a temperament as Voltaire's might derive a melancholy consolation from revisiting the scene 'de ces heureux jours quand nous étions si malheureux!' It was for the last time. Every room in the house must have recalled her. Every corner in the garden had its own memory. There was that inscription over the summer-house—

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough . . .

A Jug of Wine . . . and Thou. . . .

Here, they had been tender. There, they had quarrelled. It is not always the most perfectly loved who are the most bitterly mourned. The keenest grief is called remorse.

That goodnatured old lady—Madame de Champbonin—came to Cirey to mingle her tears with Voltaire's.

Longchamp was kept busy packing books, furniture, *vertu*, to be transmitted to Paris. Voltaire and the Marquis settled their money affairs—much to the advantage and the satisfaction of that remarkable *bonhomme*. It was arranged that Voltaire should take the whole of the house in the Rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré in Paris—of which hitherto he had only rented a part from the Marquis. They parted at the end of a fortnight: 'on the best of terms,' though they

never saw each other again. Voltaire also retained a friendship—for Saint-Lambert.

He left Cirey about September 25, and proceeded by melancholy, slow stages to Paris. He stopped for a day or two at kindly Madame de Champbonin's; at Châlons, and at Rheims, and finally reached the capital.

If the unhappy man had been miserable at Cirey he was a thousand times more so in Paris. He was alone. The house was in a dreadful confusion with the du Châtelet furniture being moved out and the Voltaire furniture being moved in. Voltaire was as sick in body as in mind. He tried to work. He did work—with his loss and his wretchedness thrusting themselves on his consciousness all the time. Sometimes in the dead of night, half dreaming, he would get up and wander about the disordered rooms, and fancying he saw Madame du Châtelet, call to her. Once, in the dark and cold, he got up and walking a few steps was too weak to go further and leant shivering, supported against a table—'yet reluctant to wake me,' says Longchamp. The unhappy man stumbled into the next room presently, and against a great pile of books lying on the floor. Longchamp found him there at last, speechless and half frozen, in the chilly dawn of the October morning. All his letters of the month are miserable enough. A few chosen friends were admitted to see him after a while—Richelieu, the d'Argentals, nephew Mignot, and Marmontel. They would come and sit by his fire in the evenings and try to distract his thoughts with talk of the drama, which he had loved. They did their best to rouse him. He had certainly never needed rousing before. Frederick the Great wrote brusquely to Algarotti that this



Voltaire talked about his grief so much he was sure to get over it quickly. Marmontel speaks of him as one moment weeping and the next laughing. Tears and laughter were both genuine enough, and to such a temperament, quite natural. There was something of the child in this Voltaire to the very last—the warm quick emotions, so keenly felt, and so keenly felt to be eternal. That they were not eternal does not impair their sincerity in the least.

He was so lonely and miserable during that dismal autumn in Paris that one day, exactly upon the same principle as a sorrowing widower marries his cook and with much the same disastrous results, he asked his niece, Madame Denis, to come and live with him. She could not do so till Christmas. Before then, Longchamp declares he had helped his master's cure by showing him some letters in which Madame du Châtelet had spoken slightly of him. There was certainly bark in that tonic if it was administered, which seems a little doubtful. How did Longchamp come by such letters?

There was a sharper bark in the fact that while Voltaire was weeping for a woman who had been false to him, that dreary old Crébillon was making fine headway at Court, had a pension from the false Pompadour, and all Paris applauding his bad verses.

It was his enemy, not his friends, who roused Voltaire at last. He woke as after a disturbed dream—at first dazed; shook himself; looked round; and began life afresh.

He was, to be sure, fifty-five years old. But fifty-five in a Voltaire, though it meant an old and decrepit body, meant a vigorous and eager mind, thirsting for life and action. He was a man of substance, and a man



whose time was his own. He had no ties. He had a reputation not a little feared. He had the world before him yet, and a world only he could save. The fighting zest to turn 'dead Catilina of Crébillon into "Rome Sauvée" of Voltaire' was the spur that urged him back to 'life and use and name and fame.'

'Rome Sauvée' had been written in a fortnight in this August of 1749, at Lunéville. 'The devil took possession of me, and said "Avenge Cicero and France: wash out the shame of your country."' Crébillon had made the subject a weariness and a foolishness in 'Catilina.' How could a Voltaire better avenge France and himself—particularly himself—than by turning the same subject into a masterpiece and a *furor*?

The pages of 'Rome Sauvée' were still wet, when he took another dull play of Crébillon's—'Électre'—and turned it into 'Oreste.'

He called together a few friends at the house of his 'angels,' the d'Argentals, and a few of the chief actors and actresses, for a reading of 'Rome Sauvée'; and read them 'Oreste' instead. The truth was the actors were in want of a play to act immediately, at the end of a week. If M. de Voltaire could not give them one—well, there were other playwrights who could! M. de Voltaire considered that his 'Rome Sauvée' would require at least six weeks' rehearsal; so he read 'Oreste.' He went in person to obtain the censor's permission for it, and did obtain it. 'Oreste' appeared in public on January 12, 1750, to a house equally crowded with the author's friends and with the faction of Crébillon, headed by Piron as usual. Voltaire had written an opening speech in which, with a touching innocence, he disclaimed all idea of being the rival of Crébillon and 'Électre.' Half the house received the

play with applause which had nothing to do with its merits, and the other half with hisses which had nothing to do with its defects. The impulsive author, who was in the d'Argentals' box and supposed to be *incognito*, forgot all about *that*, and leant over the side, crying, to encourage a burst of applause, 'Courage, brave Athenians! This is pure Sophocles.' For a few nights the vivid energy of Voltaire kept the piece going. He was improving and correcting it the whole time. 'Voltaire is a strange man,' said Fontenelle. 'He composes his pieces during their representation.' He kept the actors and actresses to their work with a dreadful determination. He was always altering and adding to their parts. Mademoiselle Clairon received at least four notes from him, full of the handsomest compliments and of apologies for making so many changes; but making them all the same. Mademoiselle Desmares at last totally declined to have her lines changed any more, or even to receive Voltaire. So, never baffled, on a day when she was giving a dinner party, he sent her a *pâté* of partridges—and behold! each partridge had a little note in its beak containing emendations to her *rôle*.

If the story be true or not, the fact remains that Voltaire was a very *exigeant* manager. He had dedicated 'Oreste' to the Duchesse du Maine; and took the pains to write her a very long letter to reproach her for not having attended the first performance. But in spite of all pains 'Oreste' was hardly a success. It was exceedingly tragic and had no love interest. It was revived, after being withdrawn for a time, which the author spent in rewriting it, and on its revival it was acted nine times. Its last performance took place on February 7, 1750.

Voltaire's grief was certainly by this time on the high road to a cure. He had to fight so hard there was no time to sit at home, dull and wretched. He did not realise at first the strength of his enemy, Crébillon. The truth is, the Court was afraid of the Voltairian pen, and meant to stand by Crébillon and applaud his dullness to the echo, only because he was Voltaire's rival. The Comédie Française—good, loyal toady—must needs think like the King. When Voltaire realised the nature of the conflict, he resolved to fight the enemy by a new method of warfare.

At Christmas 1749, Madame Denis had come to live with him. A plump widow of forty, not at all disinclined to try matrimony again, was Madame Denis by this time. She had attempted to be a playwright when Voltaire was at Lunéville; and her dear uncle had written with dreadful plainness of language to d'Argental that to write mediocre plays was the worst of careers for a man and 'the height of degradation for a woman.'

Not the less, he saw his niece as a rule through very kindly spectacles, and let his good nature so far warp his judgment as to make him think, or at any rate say, that if she was no playwright she was an actress of the highest ability. It is true that she was very fond of that amusement, having a vast appetite for pleasure of any kind. At the beginning of the year 1750 both she and her sister, Madame de Fontaine, were in the Rue Traversière; and Madame Denis was making a very goodnatured, easy-going hostess for her uncle's guests.

Voltaire had begun to go out and about again, too. it was at some very inferior amateur theatricals one night that he discovered an uncommonly good amateur



actor: sent for him, and received the trembling and delighted youth the next morning. He embraced him, and thanked God for having created a person who could be moved, and moving, even in speaking such uncommonly bad verses. The pair drank chocolate together, mixed with coffee. Lekain—that was the youth's obscure name—announced his intention of joining the King's troupe. Voltaire offered to lend him ten thousand francs to start on his own account. Eventually, he received the young actor and his company into his house, and paid all his expenses for six months—‘and since I have belonged to the stage I can prove that he has given me more than two thousand crowns,’ says the famous Lekain in his ‘Memoirs.’

There was plenty of space in the house in the Rue Traversière now the Marquis du Châtelet no longer shared it. Voltaire turned the second floor into a theatre capable of holding a hundred and twenty persons, and in a very short time had there a play-house, players, and plays which were the height of the mode and made Court and Comédie, with all their hopes pinned on poor old Crébillon of seventy-six, green with jealousy.

The Voltairian amateurs began with ‘Mahomet.’ There were only half a dozen intimates, and a few of the servants, as spectators. Lekain was in the title rôle, and the heroine was played by a shy little girl of fifteen, who—thanks, partly at least, to the energetic coaching of M. de Voltaire—became a pleasing actress. Actors and audience all stayed to supper; and, after it, M. de Voltaire produced the parts of ‘Rome Sauvée,’ distributed them, and begged the actors to learn them as soon as they could. He coached and rehearsed his



company himself. He superintended the scenery. He saw personally to the smallest details. Nothing was too much trouble if Voltaire could but outvie Crébillon, and 'Rome Sauvée' 'Catilina.' The audacious playwright actually had the coolness to make Richelieu get him the loan of the gorgeous costumes in which 'Catilina' had been played at the Comédie.

'Rome Sauvée' appeared on the boards of the theatre of the Rue Traversière before an audience composed almost exclusively of the greatest literary men of the age and country. Here were d'Alembert, the prince of mathematicians, and, to be, perpetual secretary of the Academy; Hénault, President of the Chambre des Enquêtes, and of at least two of the most famous salons in Paris; young Marmontel, rising in the world; Diderot, the encyclopædist of unclean lips; gallant and accommodating friend Richelieu; and schoolmaster d'Olivet. The performance was a brilliant success. 'Rome Sauvée' was worthy of its author. W

At a second representation that untiring person himself played the part of Cicero, and excited the enthusiasm of the audience.

The fame and ability of the troupe of the Rue Traversière reached the ears of Court and Comédie of course. They had players as good; but where were they to find such plays?

One of the aims of the performance of 'Rome Sauvée' in the Rue Traversière was attained when on February 28, 'after long hesitations,' that shiftty Pompadour—a little bit to oblige Voltaire and chiefly because no other play so suitable could be found—had 'Alzire' acted by a distinguished company of amateurs in the royal apartments.

Madame de Pompadour herself played 'Alzire.'

The Queen was not present ; nor her daughters ; nor the Dauphin ; nor the playwright himself.

But on March 6 ' Alzire ' was repeated : with Voltaire in the audience. The King was well pleased with ' Alzire,' but not with its author.

When the play was over he said loudly that he was astonished that the author of so good a play as ' Alzire ' could also have written ' Oreste ' ; and the writer of ' Oreste ' had to swallow that royal rebuff in silence.

It was in this same March of the year 1750 that Voltaire was stung to fresh action by the attacks of Fréron, enemy and journalist, the tool of Boyer, and the acknowledged foe of all the light and knowledge in France. Fréron had written an unsuccessful poem on the victory of Fontenoy, and had never forgiven Voltaire for winning where he had failed. All the aggressions seem to have been on the part of Fréron. Voltaire was only aggravatingly successful and goodhumoured. Fréron had not found it an easy task to goad him to anger. But he had done it at last. ' That worm from the carcase of Desfontaines ' was Voltaire's vigorous epithet for him now. And when in this March there was question of this ' worm ' being made Parisian correspondent to Frederick the Great—' to send him the new books and new follies of our country '—Voltaire flung on to paper a warm remonstrance to his King against any such appointment ; and then recommended in writing to Darget, Frederick's friend, the Abbé Raynal for the post instead. Raynal was not appointed ; but then neither was Fréron. For many years, Fréron was to Voltaire the wasp who stung, and stung, and stung again—with a sting not deadly indeed, but infinitely annoying and malicious.

The death of Madame du Châtelet had, not un-

naturally, been the signal for King Frederick to renew his pressing invitations to Voltaire to visit him. In the November of 1749 this most persistent of monarchs and of men had written to reproach his friend for making excuses for not coming. They *must* be excuses now! And Voltaire was so apt in them! In December the King wrote again. In the January of 1750, more persistently still. In February—well, I will not press an immediate visit: but I will hold you bound to come when the weather is better and Flora has beautified this climate of mine.

It was all very flattering. Voltaire felt it to be so. He was in the not uncommon position of the man who likes to be asked but does not want to go. There were many reasons against his going. He had just settled into his house in Paris. Niece Denis had come to look after it for him. All his friends lived hard by. The feverish events of the past year had made rest and quiet peculiarly desirable. His health made them almost necessary. Travelling was exceedingly expensive. But if these were all good reasons for remaining in the Rue Traversière-Saint-Honoré, there were better ones for leaving it.

Running now through Paris were those gay satirical *contes* of his which ridiculed every vice of the old *régime* and made King, court, and confessor supremely ridiculous. The graceless old Duchesse du Maine sitting up in bed at three o'clock in the morning, had laughed to hear her order burlesqued in 'Zadig.' But all her class had not her saving sense of humour. The satire was too keen not to cut—the portraits too life-like to be unrecognised.

If he had stopped at 'Zadig,' at 'Barbouc,' at 'Scarmentado,' there was no reason in the world



why Voltaire should be a popular member of the society he had chastised with such whips. And when he chastised it with the scorpions of that deadly pamphlet of brief paragraphs called the 'Voice of the Sage and the People,' there was very small wonder that he should once more find Paris getting too hot to hold him.

The 'Voice of the Sage and the People' is the voice of the man who could sting with bald truths as well as lively satires. It hacked at superstition and the Mirepoix with a hatchet that always went to the root of the tree. 'A government in which it is permitted a certain class of men to say "Let those pay taxes who work: we should not pay because we are idle"—is no better than a government of Hottentots.' 'A woman who nurses a couple of children and spins does more for the state than all convents have ever done.' 'The Church ought to contribute to the expenses of the nation in proportion to its revenues. . . . The body set apart to teach justice should begin by giving an example of it.' Forty years later these truths were enforced by the blood of the Revolution.

Could Voltaire have thought even in 1750 that they were politic truths to utter in a city where he had just bought a house and was much minded to settle down and be at peace? It is to his infinite and lifelong credit that he seldom cared whether a truth were politic or no. The moment he saw it to be truth he must utter it in scorn of consequence.

Even 'Rome Sauvée' and 'Oreste' could not shield a man responsible for the paternity of such writing as this, nor the uncertain smile of a Pompadour save him from its consequences. Well, he had better go! He had always wished to travel in Italy. He would take



Potsdam and Berlin *en route*. His visit there could be brief. On May 8, 1750, he wrote to Frederick saying that, though he was rich, 'even very rich for a man of letters,' his house in Paris and the du Châtelet affairs had made him so short of money that he must beg the royal permission for Mettra, an exchange dealer of Berlin, to advance him four thousand crowns for the expenses of his proposed journey. The delighted King wrote back on May 24 enclosing a letter of exchange for sixteen thousand francs. He was willing to pay, and to pay highly, for a man who was 'a whole Academy of *belles-lettres* in himself.' Voltaire was gratified of course. But he wrote dismally that he was more in need of a doctor than a king, and on June 9 spoke of himself to that King, in verse which was meant to be gay and sounds a little dreary, as 'your very aged Danaë, who leaves his little home for your star-spangled dwelling-place, of which his years make him unworthy.' A little home is so much more comfortable than a star-spangled dwelling-place, after all! Voltaire in fact needed a spur to make him undertake that long talked-of visit with alacrity. And he had it.

Among the many other poor and generally worthless literary hangers-on, whom the most generous literary genius of any age had commissioned his agent Moussinot to assist with gifts of money, was one Baculard d'Arnaud. A conceited young writer of very fluent rhymes and three, dull, unacted tragedies, was d'Arnaud.

But he was needy and a man of letters. That was enough for Voltaire. He procured him the post of Paris correspondent to King Frederick for which Raynal and Fréron had competed unsuccessfully, and

on April 25, 1750, young d'Arnaud arrived in Berlin, with letters and verses from Voltaire to the King. A personable young man was Baculard. A gay head, very easily turned. Was it to pique Voltaire that Frederick gave Voltaire's *protégé* a pension of five thousand francs yearly, and compliments much above his merits? If so, that aim failed at first. On May 19 Voltaire wrote to young d'Arnaud the kindest of friendly letters. On May 31 d'Arnaud wrote to Voltaire saying that he was waiting for him 'as a child awaits his father.' The father was not hurrying himself, it appears.

On June 22, Voltaire and his company of clever amateurs were at Sceaux: and played 'Rome Sauvée' to the Duchesse du Maine and her court, Voltaire taking Cicero, and Lekain, Lentulus Sura.

On June 23, Collé, writer of memoirs, meets Theriot, that idle gossip of a Theriot, who tells Collé a most *piquant*, incredible story about the great Frederick and little Baculard d'Arnaud. Then friend Marмонтel, also writer of memoirs (and of memoirs written, it must be remembered, many years after the events they chronicle), tells how he and Theriot went to see Voltaire together one morning and found him writing in bed as usual. Theriot played the part of candid friend. 'I have news to tell you,' says he. 'Well, what is it?' asks the writer in bed. 'D'Arnaud has arrived at Potsdam and the King has received him with open arms.' 'With open arms?' says Voltaire. 'And that d'Arnaud has written him an Epistle.' 'Dull and bombastic, I suppose?' 'On the contrary, very good, and so good the King has replied by another Epistle!' 'What! the King of Prussia an Epistle to d'Arnaud?' says the person in bed, roused a little.

'Someone has been gaming you, Theriot.' But Theriot produces copies of the two Epistles from his pockets. Voltaire stretches out a lean hand, seizes and reads them. 'What rubbish! What platitudes!' says he, reading d'Arnaud's verses to Frederick. But Frederick had not thought so. Then he comes to Frederick's verses to d'Arnaud, and reads 'for a moment in silence and with an air of pity.'

D'Arnaud, by your genius fair  
You will warm our bleak North air;  
And the music of your lyre  
Kindle quick my muse's fire—

and so on; and so on. Not much in *that*, to be sure. But when he came to the last verse—

The French Apollo 'gins to die  
And his term of fame is nigh.  
Come then, you, and take his place,  
Rise and shine: outgrace his grace.  
The sunset of a gorgeous day  
A finer sunrise brings away—

he sprang out of bed as if he had been stung and danced about the room in a fury. 'I will go! I will go!' he cried, 'if only to teach him to know mankind!'

That 'sunset' had accomplished Frederick's purpose. Perhaps he had guessed it would. He was certainly too astute to really think that a d'Arnaud's twinkle would show at all in a sky where the sun of a Voltaire's genius beamed and burnt.

'To sit high is to be lied about.' Many of Marmontel's 'facts' are conspicuously inaccurate. But if this story be true—and having regard to Voltaire's character it sounds at least as if it had truth in it—no doubt remains that he was quite clever enough to



disguise his anger. A gay little versified reproach to Frederick dated June 26, 1750—that was all. The very reproach was written from Compiègne whither the Gentleman-in-Ordinary had gone to beg the permission of Louis XV. to visit Frederick II. Frederick was to pay all expenses of the journey. Voltaire would put the *cachet* of genius on the King's prose and verse which just missing that, just missed everything. He left his house in the Rue Saint-Honoré in the joint care of Longchamp and Madame Denis, giving the latter a handsome income for its maintenance. He apologised to his friends for leaving them.

And on June 26 the 'domestique' of the King, as he called himself, was at Compiègne, as has been seen, taking leave of his master. The farewell was hardly a success. Louis wanted the dangerous Voltaire gone, and was offended at his going. What room was there in France for the author of those shameless *contes* and that loud passionate 'Voice of the Sage and the People'? None. That 'Voice' had been the sensation of the year among the orthodox. A hundred 'Voices' had been raised to answer it—in parody, in refutation, in agreement. Even the Pompadour was offended—this clever Voltaire had whispered in her ear too apt and impudent a couplet. True, when he took farewell of her, she smiled on him a little and sent her kind regards to King Frederick. When Voltaire gave the message, that astute boor of a monarch curtly observed, 'I do not know her'—and the artful Voltaire wrote the Pompadour some very pretty verses to tell her that he had the honour to give Venus the thanks of Achilles!

As for his French Majesty, when Voltaire begged permission to visit the Prussian, *he* turned his back on



the greatest man in his kingdom and said indifferently, 'You can go when you like.'

Even now, a word would have detained Voltaire. But that word was far from being spoken. After he was gone, there arose at Court one day some question of the royal treatment of this child of genius. 'After all,' said Louis, 'I have treated him as well as Louis XIV. treated Racine and Boileau. . . . It is not my fault if he aspires to sup with a king;' and proceeded to add that if he had been too goodnatured to talent '*all that*'—which included d'Alembert, Fontenelle, Maupertuis, Montesquieu, Prévost—'would have dined or supped with me.' Comment is needless.

Voltaire left France with Boyer keeping the conscience of King and Dauphin; and keeping from the people light, knowledge, and advancement. The *ânes* of Mirepoix were the sworn enemies, not of Voltaire alone, but of all his friends, of all the intellect of France. Fréron, that 'worm from the carcase of Desfontaines,' was their tongue and pen. They were busy now refusing the Sacrament to dying Jansenists who could not produce a certificate to show they had accepted the Bull Unigenitus. Voltaire could not resist a parting shaft at them. Two little pamphlets, gently satirical and both directed against the clergy, were the final bolts which shut the gates of Paris upon him for eight-and-twenty years. In the belief that he was leaving it for a very few months at the most, he set out from Compiègne on a day towards the end of June; but precisely what day is not certain. On July 2 he was at Cleves. On July 10, 1750, he arrived at the palace of King Frederick the Great, at Potsdam.

## CHAPTER XXI

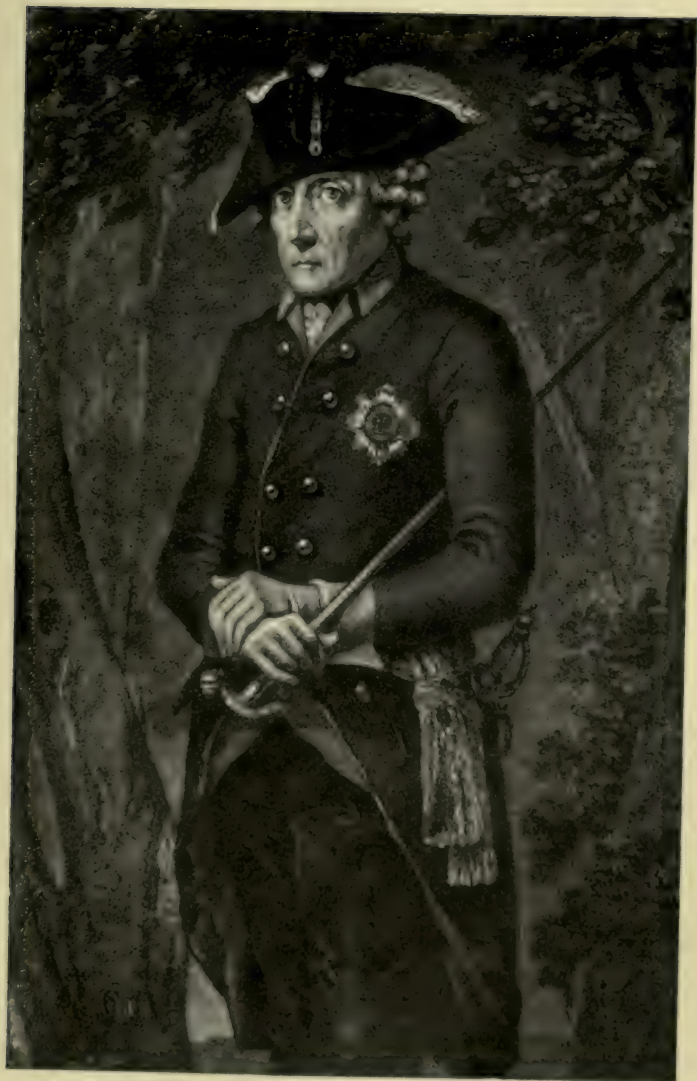
## GLAMOUR

CLEAN, quiet Potsdam stands on the river Havel and is sixteen miles from Berlin. In 1745 the great Frederick had begun to build there the little, white, one-storied palace called Sans-Souci. He desired to be buried at the foot of a statue of Flora on one of its terraces—‘when I am there I shall be *sans souci*.’

The French tastes of the royal architect are everywhere evident. Sans-Souci is a kind of miniature Versailles. It stands on a hill. Formal terraces slope to a formal park. Here are statues, and a fountain—all the artificial and no natural beauties. Within the palace may still be seen, almost unaltered, the rooms where the great King lived and died—his chair, his clock, his portrait. In the picture gallery he walked and talked with Voltaire. And in the west wing is the room occupied by that favoured guest, and before him by the Maréchal de Saxe.

Voltaire arrived then at Sans-Souci on July 10, after a journey which cost thrifty Frederick 600*l.*, and during which the traveller had visited the famous battlefields of Fontenoy, Raucoux, and Lawfeld.

It was ten years since Voltaire had escaped from his Madame du Châtelet to first see in the flesh the hero of his dreams. It was fourteen years since the



FREDERICK THE GREAT.

*From an Engraving by Cunero, after the Painting by Cunningham.*





pair had first exchanged adoring letters. Their friendship was of European fame. They were the two greatest men of their age. Half the world watched their meeting: and awaited results.

The pair fell metaphorically, and perhaps literally too, into each other's arms. This day had been so long delayed. The host had worked for it so persistently, doggedly, and consistently! The visitor had so warmly wanted it when it had been wholly impossible—and when it was inevitable had done his best to recall that early enthusiasm.

The enthusiasm may well have come back to him now. It *did* come back. Instead of sulky Louis' cold shoulder, was 'my Frederick the Great,' flattery, honour, and consideration. Potsdam was gay and busy with preparations for a splendid *fête* to be held in Berlin in August. But it forgot gaiety and business alike to do honour to Voltaire.

Saxe's apartments left nothing to be desired. The royal stables were at the guest's disposal. There were music and conversation. On July 24 the guest sketched Potsdam for d'Argental — 'one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers . . . opera, comedy, philosophy, poetry, grandeur and graces, grenadiers and muses, trumpets and violins, the suppers of Plato, society and liberty—who would believe it? Yet it is very true.'

And on August 1 to Thibouville, 'To find all the charms of society, in a king who has won five battles; to be in the midst of drums and to hear the lyre of Apollo; . . . to pass one's days half in *fêtes*, half in the delights of a quiet and occupied life'—here was glamour indeed.

And then on a day before August 14, and before Voltaire had been five weeks at Potsdam, Frederick,

who perfectly understood the policy of striking while the iron is hot, offered his dearest friend, if he would but stay with him for ever, the post of Chamberlain, a Royal Order, twenty thousand francs per annum, and niece Denis a yearly pension of four thousand francs if she would come and keep her uncle's house in Berlin.

The offer was so sudden and so brilliant! That impetuosity which had made all his shrewdness of none avail a hundred times before, was still at once Voltaire's charm and stumbling-block. He forgot 'Anti-Machiavelli' and d'Arnaud. Everything that makes life delightful surrounded him at the moment. Behind him lay the Bastille of his youth, flight to Holland, hiding at Cirey, the 'English Letters' burnt by the hangman, the fierce persecution for that babbling trifle the 'Mondain,' the Pompadour's false smile, the kingly scowl, Crébillon, Desfontaines, Boyer. At its best his country had given him grudging and empty honours. If he had won fame and fortune, it had been in spite of courtly malice and for ever at the point of the sword. He was sick to the soul of gagging and injustice. It was not the least part of his bitterness against his Louis, that he had cringed to and flattered such a creature—in vain. He was fifty-six years old. The fifty-six years had been one long persecution. He had still the daring spirit of a boy. He had still such deeds to do that the gods would make him immortal, if need be, to do them. A new heaven and a new earth lay before him. He accepted the offer—and began the world again.

There is still preserved his letter to Madame Denis, dated August 14, 1750, wherein he tells her of Frederick's bounty. It has the spontaneous enthusiasm

of youth. 'You *must* come, niece Louise,' it says in effect. 'Think of the magnificence of the offer! And then—Berlin has such operas!' (shrewd Uncle Voltaire!) He had hardly been given time to breathe, much less to think, since he arrived at Potsdam. Pleasure had succeeded to pleasure and flattery to flattery. For three hours at a time he would criticise his royal host's writings. Crafty Frederick gave up whole days to *belles-lettres*. There was everything to intoxicate the excitable brain of this French child of genius. The great Frederick was cool enough. *He* had no glamour. Does it make the great Voltaire less lovable that he saw things all *en rose* or *en noir*, was led dangerous lengths by his emotions, and for all that rasping cynicism could be a dreamer of dreams, a visionary, and a sentimentalist?

Practical niece Denis, with her vulgar, shrewd instincts, wrote back and said that no man could be the friend of a king. Toady or slave—but friend, never. And Voltaire, carried to Berlin in the whirl of the Court for the Carrousel, wrote to d'Argental begging him to persuade her, and asking d'Argental's forgiveness for the course upon which he was resolved.

On August 23, Frederick, having read Madame Denis's letter, condescended to write with his own royal hand from his private apartment to beg Voltaire to stay with him. What more flattering? Yet even now Voltaire was not quite sure he was wise. He took such immense pains to prove himself so. But he had decided irrevocably—and flung the responsibility of that choice on destiny at last. 'I abandon myself to my fate,' he wrote on August 28, 'and throw myself head foremost into that abyss.'

The fall was soft enough at first.



The Carrousel had begun about August 8.

Berlin was crowded with noble and distinguished guests from all lands. Frederick rode about the city on horseback, personally supervising the preparations for the *fête*. Red of face, portly of figure, eight-and-thirty years old and much addicted to snuff—one of his English guests thus described him, not ungraphically. With his five great battles behind him and such a future before him as might well surpass the wildest flights of fancy, he was a great man to call ‘friend.’

And in Berlin, among the notables of all Europe convened to celebrate a Carrousel which should make Louis XIV.’s famous *fête* of the Tuileries dull and obscure, the great Voltaire was only less honoured than the great Frederick himself. He may be forgiven for thinking he had chosen well.

Among the guests was the Margravine of Bayreuth, Frederick’s sister, and very much Voltaire’s friend. In 1743 he had spent ten days with her at Bayreuth. French plays were acted—but, strangely enough, no plays by M. Arouet de Voltaire. He was a spectator on the occasion. He had said truly of himself that he loved good verses so much that he loved other people’s—‘which is a great deal for a poet.’ On August 17 the French players acted the ‘*Mauvais Riche*’ of his vain little rival, Baculard d’Arnaud. But Voltaire was in the mood when he was ready to be pleased with anything. On August 26 was played the ‘*Iphigénie*’ of Racine, and on the 27th the ‘*Médecin Malgré Lui*.’

‘The language least talked at Court was German,’ said Voltaire. ‘Our tongue and literature have made more conquests than Charlemagne.’ He wrote delightedly of the King’s brother and sister, Henry



and Amelia, as the most charming reciters of French verse. His spectacles were rose-coloured indeed.

August 25 was the crowning point of the *fête*, one of those splendid revelries which were the boast of the old *régime*—and died with it. The Carrousel of the Sun King had been glorious. The Berlin Carrousel far outvied it. It was, too, one of the golden nights of Voltaire's life, and lives in history for that reason.

The courtyard of the great palace in Berlin had been turned into an amphitheatre. Three thousand soldiers under arms lined the approaches to the place. Forty-six thousand lights illuminated it. Tier above tier, brilliantly appparelled, blazing with jewels, the nobility of all lands, sat the spectators. Among them were Lord Melton and Sir Jonas Hanway—'a chiel among you, takin' notes'—and Collini, a young Florentine. Save only the royal box, every seat was occupied. The hush of expectation was on the audience. And then, on a sudden, gorgeous in dress, as that period alone knew how to be gorgeous, 'among a group of great lords,' a lean figure moved towards the King's enclosure. For an instant the house was silent. And then there swept through it a murmur like the wind among the trees—'Voltaire!' 'Voltaire!'

It was a moment worth life and worth death. A stranger and foreigner raised by genius alone to that mighty eminence of fame to which genius, a proud line of royal ancestors, and five great battles had raised Frederick the King! Every eye was upon this son of a notary, this Paris *bourgeois*, Voltaire. Collini noticed the delight in the piercing eyes, and a certain modesty of demeanour very pleasing. Voltaire *had* chosen rightly after all! There could have been no doubt in his impressionable mind at that magnificent minute.

Then in the arena the tournament began. Voltaire described it as fairyland, the *fête* of Chinese lanterns, and the Carrousel of Louis the Magnificent, all in one. The competitors in the fray were royal, and a princess—Venus and the apple—gave away the prizes. After the tournament was a supper, and after the supper a ball. Voltaire did not go to that. He was surfeited with delight—*las* with adulation. He had already written of his great host that he scratched with one hand and caressed with the other. To-night it had been all caresses. And would surely be caresses for ever! ‘When a clever man commits a folly, it is not a small one.’

The plan as now formed was that Voltaire, with Prussia as home, should travel in Italy in this autumn of 1750 and so gratify a desire of years, and that in the spring of 1751 Madame Denis should join him in Berlin. In the meantime, Prussia was heaven.

On September 12 he wrote again to his niece earnestly trying to persuade her of its charms. And would have succeeded very likely if she had not had particular reasons of her own at the time for preferring Paris.

Even at Berlin and during a Carrousel Voltaire had entire liberty. Or at least as much liberty as fame and distinctions allow any man. His days were his own. In the morning he studied ‘to the sound of the drum.’ In the evening queens asked him to supper, he said, and were not offended when he denied them. He spent hours correcting Frederick’s works, and observed gallantly ‘*Cæsar supra grammaticam*’ to excuse the noble pupil’s defects in that department. He gave up the kingly dinners presently—there were too many generals and princes, forsooth, for this M. de Voltaire.

On September 14 'Rome Sauvée' was played in the rooms of the Princess Amelia at Berlin and on a stage especially erected by its author, who took the part of Cicero as he had done at Sceaux and in the Rue Traversière. He also trained the company and lost his temper with them, exactly as he had lost it with his troupe in Paris. When the tumult of *fêtes* was past, the Court went back to Potsdam. Life was a thousand times more delightful than ever. 'I have my whole time to myself, I am crossed in nothing.' 'I find a port after thirty years of storm. I find the protection of a king, the conversation of a philosopher, the charms of an agreeable man united in one who for sixteen years consoled me in misfortune and sheltered me from my enemies. . . . If one can be certain of anything it is of the character of the King of Prussia.' 'I have the audacity to think that nature has made me for him. I have found so singular a likeness between his tastes and mine that I have forgotten he is the ruler of half Germany and the other half trembles at his name. . . .' 'The conqueror of Austria loves *belles-lettres*, which I love with all my heart.' 'My marriage is accomplished then. Will it be happy? I do not know. I cannot help myself saying "Yes." One had to finish by marriage after coquetting for so many years.'

Even the d'Arnaud affair 'does not prevent the King of Prussia from being the most amiable and remarkable of men.' Nay, d'Arnaud himself was a very 'good devil' after all. And the Prussian climate so rigorous? Not a bit of it. What are a few rays of sunshine more or less to make us give ourselves such airs? The glamour was complete.

All the letters from which these extracts are taken were written less than four months after Voltaire's



arrival in Prussia, and when the contrast between his treatment there, and the treatment meted to him in France, was fresh and glaring. All the letters were written to persons who only half approved, or wholly disapproved, of what Lord Chesterfield called Voltaire's 'emigration.'

His friends, enemies, and niece were all united in fearing and disliking it. In Paris a caricature was being sold in the street: 'Voltaire the famous Prussian! Look at him with his great bearskin bonnet to keep out the cold! Six sous for Voltaire the famous Prussian!'

At the French Court the offended attitude of King Louis had not changed. King Frederick wrote very civilly to borrow the great Voltaire from his brother of France. And his brother of France, says d'Argenson, replied he should be very glad to make the loan, and turning to his courtiers, added that there would be one fool more at the Court of the King of Prussia 'and one fool less at mine.'

On October 27, Voltaire wrote to tell the d'Argentals that his post of Historiographership had been taken away from him; though Madame de Pompadour had told him, in a little note, that King Louis had had the goodness to allow him to keep an old pension of two thousand livres.

'I do not know why the King should deprive me of the Historiographership and let me retain the title of his Gentleman-in-Ordinary,' Voltaire wrote rather disgustingly to Madame Denis on October 28. But after all, what did it matter? In return for the Historiographership he had the post of Chamberlain to the King of Prussia, that Royal Prussian Order, and that yearly Prussian pension.



He had exchanged strife for peace; slights for honour; and Louis XV. for Frederick the Great. How *could* he be wrong?

It is always far harder to guess the mind of Frederick on any given occasion, than the mind of Voltaire. Frederick at least was sure that Voltaire was worth keeping even at a heavy price to be 'the glory of one's own Court and the envy of the world.' Gay, witty, and easy—a past master of the art of conversation—and with an impulsive susceptibility to the impressions of the moment wholly fascinating—the King was not wrong in placing a high estimate on the companionship of Voltaire. The King knew genius when he saw it. He meant to keep it now he had it. So, after a day spent in the ardours of government and military duty, at five he became the verse-maker, the man of ease and letters, the polished Frenchman instead of the great German soldier.

At seven, he had his evening concert, small, select, delightful. 'If you think the King loves music,' said someone, 'you are wrong. He loves only the flute and only his own flute.' (To be sure, such an egoism has been known as a love of music both before and since.) No women were admitted. Frederick the Great's dislike of that sex is historical, and was always consistent and unmoved. And then, at nine o'clock began those immortal suppers of the gods. Voltaire was of course of them from the earliest days of his stay in Prussia.

Half Europe watched them from afar. Much more than half the genius of Europe would have paid a high price to have been of them. They generally consisted of about ten persons. The only language spoken was French, and more than half the *habitués* were of that favoured nation. The other half included two Scotch-

men, one Prussian, and that great Prussian-Frenchman, Frederick himself. Baculard d'Arnaud, though living at Potsdam and under the immediate eye and favour of the King, was not invited. The meal was severely sober and frugal. The King rose at twelve, as clear-headed as he had sat down. Sometimes his guests prolonged that feast of reason far into the morning. The servants who waited on them contracted, it is said, swellings in the legs from too much standing. Occasionally, Frederick was not of the party at all. He supped with Colonel Balby instead. 'What is the King doing this evening?' it was asked of Voltaire. 'Il balbutie' was the ready answer.

Great among the *convives* of the supper was Maupertuis, the pompous and touchy geometrician, the President of the Berlin Academy, and once the friend and the tutor of Madame du Châtelet. He had stayed at Cirey in 1739. Voltaire had never liked anything about him but his talents. Surly, solemn, and unsociable, he was already antipathetic in every attribute of his character to the brilliant Frenchman.

Another visitor of Cirey was also of the suppers—Algarotti, the amiable Italian, the agreeable man of the world, the 'Swan of Padua,' whose 'Newtonianism for Ladies' Émilie's Newton had so completely eclipsed.

Here too was La Mettrie, a free-thinking French doctor of medicine, with his ribald, rollicking stories and his bold atheism, 'the most frank and the most foolish of men.' He had become notorious as the author of a book called 'The Man Machine' in which he had gaily proved, to his own satisfaction, the material nature of the soul.

Then there was 'the brave Major Chasot,' an

excellent type of a gallant eighteenth-century French gentleman. He had saved the King's life at the battle of Mollwitz, but owed the coveted *entrée* to the suppers less to that heroism than to the facts that he was French and flute-player.

Here too was d'Argens, a profligate French marquis, whom Frederick loved for 'his wit, his learning, and his person ;' and who was at once credulous and sceptical, free thinking and superstitious.

The other Frenchman was Darget, reader, confidant, and secretary to the royal host, very discreet, reserved, and judicious, a man to be trusted. It did not take a subtle Voltaire long to recognise the value of the friendship of this friend of the King. Frederick often wrote to Voltaire through Darget, and Voltaire replied to Darget in terms of tenderness and admiration.

Then there was the French ambassador of Irish birth—Lord Tyrconnel—famous for giving heavy dinners, whose *rôle* 'was to be always at table,' and who had the brusque honest speech of British forbears. Lady Tyrconnel had receptions in Berlin and presently acted in Voltaire's company of noble amateurs.

The Scotchmen were the two brothers George and James Keith, Jacobites and gentlemen, 'not only accomplished men, but nobles and warriors,' the only friends of the King whom his bitter tongue spared. Nay more, George Keith was, says Macaulay, 'the only human being whom Frederick ever really loved.' Earl Marischal of Scotland, he had fought with his brave young brother for that forlorn hope, the cause of the Stuarts, in 1715. They had long wandered on the Continent, and at last found a home in Potsdam with Frederick.



The only Prussian of the suppers was Baron Pollnitz, and he was cosmopolitan, had many times visited Paris, and had a rich store of travellers' tales. Clever and well born, he was extravagant and miserably poor; and since he could not afford to lose Frederick's favour, was the butt of his royal master's cruellest jokes—the wretched scapegoat who could not escape and whose very helplessness goaded Frederick's bitter wit to new effort.

Of such an assembly as this, versatile and brilliant though it was, Voltaire and the King were the natural leaders.

Sulzer, who had listened to it, declared that it was better to hear the conversation of Voltaire, Algarotti, and d'Argens than to read the most interesting and best written book in the world. The talk was on 'morals, history, philosophy.' It was the boast of the talkers that they had no prejudices. They explored all subjects as one explores a newly discovered country, knowing neither whether it be sterile or fertile, rich or poor—eager to learn, sharp-set to see—and without fear of consequence. No topic was debarred them. The only intoxication was of ideas. 'One thinks boldly, one is free,' said Voltaire. 'Wit, reason, and science' abounded. Frederick stimulated the conversation by always taking one side of a question when his guests took the other. His own tongue was so caustic that it has been said that it is difficult to conceive how 'anything short of hunger should have induced men to bear the misery of being the associates of the great King.' But that is to take a very one-sided view of his character. If one hand could scratch, the other could caress. If on one side of his nature he was a brutal jester, an untamed barbarian, on the other he was a



thinker and a philosopher with all the light, the ease, the charm, and the cultivation of France.

Besides, there was one man at the suppers whom the King feared. Frederick's satire was a saw; but Voltaire's was a knife: and the clumsier instrument dreaded the finer. A needy Pollnitz or a patient Darget might bear the royal insolence in silence. But it did not yet dare to encounter that 'most terrible of all the intellectual weapons ever wielded by man, the mockery of Voltaire.' Saw and knife seem both, for the while, to have been quietly put away.

A Voltaire with his splendid capacity for living in the present moment may sometimes have forgotten the very existence of the King's weapon. 'No cloud,' 'far less a storm,' marred the harmony of those suppers.

Between them, operas, receptions, correcting the royal compositions, and spending long days with his own, the September and October of this autumn of 1750 passed away. Now and again a courtly Voltaire went to pay his devoirs at the Court of the Queen Mother and read her cantos of the 'Pucelle,' which he assured the good Protestant lady was nothing in the world but a satire on the Church of Rome. Nor did he neglect to attend the dull and frugal receptions of Frederick's unhappy wife, the pretty and accomplished Elizabeth Christina. Hanbury Williams was in Berlin in September as English envoy, and made Voltaire complimentary verses on 'Rome Sauvée.' The exile continued to write long letters to his friends, speaking of his speedy return to France and of the thousand delights of life in his present 'paradise of philosophers.'

He *had* chosen rightly after all! All would be well. All *was* well. But——

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE RIFT WITHIN THE LUTE

ON November 6, 1750, at Potsdam, and after he had been in Prussia rather less than three months, Uncle Voltaire took his versatile pen in hand and wrote to Louise Denis a famous letter—the letter of Buts. Prussia had fulfilled all his hopes, nay, had exceeded them, but——. ‘The King’s suppers are delightful, but——.’ ‘My life is at once free and occupied, but——.’ ‘Operas, comedies, carousals, suppers at Sans-Souci, military manœuvres, concerts, study, readings, but——.’ ‘Berlin splendid with its gracious queens and charming princesses, but——.’ ‘But, my dear, a very fine frost has set in.’

That letter might serve not only as a description of life at Potsdam, but of all human life. A most delightful world, but——. The truth was that Voltaire had begun to feel the grip of Frederick’s iron hand. On November 17 he wrote again to his niece and told her a little, ugly story. Secretary Darget had lost his wife. And the great Frederick wrote to him a letter of sympathy, ‘very touching, pathetic, and even Christian;’ and the same day made a shameful epigram upon the dead woman. ‘It does not bear thinking about,’ wrote Voltaire. Whose turn might it not be

next? 'We are here . . . like monks in an abbey,' he added. 'God grant the abbot stops at making game of us!'

There was another source of trouble going on at the same time. Who could have expected that a Voltaire and a d'Arnaud could share a kingdom in peace? 'Do you not know,' Voltaire said once, 'that when there are two Frenchmen in a foreign court or country one of them must die?' He had forgiven that 'rising sun' affair: but he had not forgotten it. This d'Arnaud, too, was the most absurd, conceited, ungrateful simpleton imaginable.

Voltaire had not only lent him money. He had done much more than that. He had tried to make his *protégé* fit for some good post—to make him improve, for instance, a shameful handwriting. He had introduced him to Helvétius. He is 'as my son,' 'he has merit,' 'he is poor and virtuous.' In return Baculard had paid his master some fine compliments; and in 1739 had written a preface for a new edition of M. de Voltaire's works, in which the flattery was so fulsome that M. de Voltaire himself cut out, or toned down, some of the most eulogistic passages.

Then came Baculard's invitation to Prussia. He gave himself the finest insolent airs. He pretended to be surprised at the smallness of the handsome pension Frederick had given him. If he was not of the suppers, he had every other honour. He was received by the princes, and play-acted with them. The story goes that being given a part in 'Mariamne' too small for his conceit, he did it as badly as he could; and Voltaire lost his temper with him and cried out 'You are not clever enough for the *rôle*; you do not even know how to speak the words!' But Baculard's hot head was

turned. The princes, and that negligible quantity Frederick's wife, had taken him up and were playing him off against Frederick's Voltaire. Then the misguided young man was positively foolish enough to ally himself with Voltaire's enemy, Fréron, and to attack the wickedest, cleverest foe that ever man had. Baculard wrote Fréron a letter to be shown about Paris, in which he not only denied the authorship of that flattering preface written in 1739, but added that Voltaire himself had inserted therein 'horrible things' against France.

And of a sudden, Voltaire flung off the encumbering mantle of comfortable prosperity he had worn for so short a time and was at his foolish bombastical minor poet, tooth and nail.

On November 14, 1750, he wrote to tell his Angel of the affair. Then he wrote to King Frederick and insisted on Frederick taking his part—cool Frederick who would fain have conciliated both parties. I cannot meet the man, Sire! He is going to-day to Berlin in Prince Henry's carriage, why should he not stop there to study, to attend the Academy—whatever you like! I do not mention the word *renvoi*, but that is what I mean. 'And I leave all to the goodness and prudence of your Majesty.'

On November 24 a very triumphant uncle wrote to his niece that 'the rising sun has gone to bed.' D'Arnaud in fact had been ordered to leave Berlin in twenty-four hours and—the King had forgotten to pay the expenses of his journey. Voltaire was victorious. Most of his friends and all his enemies both in Paris and Berlin had been watching that quarrel with a scrutiny seemingly out of all proportion to its importance. D'Arnaud had gone into obscurity for ever. But the



easily elated Voltaire was not long elated this time somehow. Here again was food for thought. If one favourite was lost as suddenly as a bright exhalation in the evening and no man saw him more, why not another? 'And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer, never to hope again.'

The victory left Arouet strangely pensive.

D'Arnaud had not only wrought mischief, it appears, but left a train of it behind him. His patron, Prince Henry, had long desired a copy of that fire-brand, that stormy petrel, the 'Pucelle.' Just before his dismissal, the obliging d'Arnaud had helped the Prince to corrupt Voltaire's secretary, Tinois; and paid him to copy some cantos of the poem for the Prince, by night. Tinois was a young man whom Voltaire had taken into his service when he was at Rheims in October 1749, for no better reason than that he had written rather a pretty verse after reading 'Rome Sauvée.' On January 3, 1751, Voltaire wrote to Madame Denis that he had dismissed Tinois, and that Prince Henry had sworn to keep the 'Pucelle' secret and safe. But if 'put not your trust in princes' had long been the burden of Madame du Châtelet's and of his niece's warnings, it had sunk into Voltaire's soul now. He was not at ease.

The successor of the faithless Tinois gave him further trouble.

The new secretary's name was Richier. He had a friend called Lessing who was to be the great German writer, but who was now obscure, poor, and unknown, two-and-twenty years of age, and trying to make a livelihood in Berlin by copying and translating. Richier introduced him to the great Voltaire; and the good-natured Voltaire gave Lessing work and became very

much his friend. Then the foolish Richier lends Lessing a volume of Voltaire's 'Century of Louis XIV.'—the work and pride of so many years—and now almost ready for the press. Lessing leaves Berlin—with the volume. Considering the fact that the upright character of Lessing was not then a notorious thing, it is not wonderful that Voltaire was alarmed. Suppose Lessing should publish the volume on his own account, and in its imperfect state! Voltaire wrote Lessing a very courteous letter asking for its return. And Lessing sent back the manuscript with some very ill-timed jokes. Lessing, it must be remembered, was nobody, and young; and Voltaire was past middle life and the most famous literary man of his period. The offender never forgave Voltaire for having suspected that he would make dishonourable use of his manuscript. But, after all, Voltaire seems to have been more sinned against than sinning.

There were, too, going on at the same time various mean domestic disagreeables—literally storms in tea-cups. Formey, writer of memoirs, but not always of reliable memoirs, records how Voltaire complained to the King of the bad sugar, coffee, tea, and chocolate served to him; how the King apologised, and altered nothing; and how angry the great Voltaire demeaned himself to be over these trifles. Did he remember that he had written hotly to Alliot, King Stanislas' chamberlain at Lunéville, in 1749, just before the death of Madame du Châtelet, on a like subject? 'I can assure you at Berlin I am not obliged to beg for bread, wine, and candles.' And now! The truth is best summed up by the most thorough and minute of all Voltaire's biographers, Desnoiresterres. 'He used, and thought he was entitled to use largely, a hospitality

which he had only accepted after many invitations and prayers.' He asked his friends to dine with him on 'the King's roast' without any fear of exceeding his rights as a guest. Formey adds that he appropriated the candle-ends which were the servants' perquisites; and records that, through meanness, when the Court was in mourning he appeared in a borrowed black suit and returned it to its portly owner, cut to the dimensions of the lean Voltairian figure. The story seems to be that lie which is part of the truth. True or false, it is not worth examination. No doubtful anecdotes are needed to prove that Voltaire was the sensitive philosopher whose delicate body made him singularly unphilosophic in trifles; or that in money affairs he was at once exceedingly generous and prudently thrifty.

But he had to do now with a money affair in which his prudence, alas! was only conspicuous by its absence.

In November of 1750 had begun his too famous affair with Hirsch, Jew usurer of Berlin.

He had been first brought into relations with the shifty Israelite on November 9. On the day following he played 'Cicero' in his 'Rome Sauvée'—a blaze of jewels, borrowed from the Hirsch father and son. On November 23 he received Hirsch *fils* (Hirsch *fils* transacted all the business, Hirsch *père* being well stricken in years) in his room at Potsdam quite close to the unconscious Frederick; and there, forsooth, M. de Voltaire, with the aid of M. Hirsch, plans to do on the quiet a little illegal stock-jobbing. Several years before, the Elector of Saxony had established a bank in Dresden. It issued such an immense number of notes that 'the currency of Saxony was inflated: for a time



a note of one hundred thalers was worth but fifty.' Frederick, when the Silesian war made him master of Dresden, stipulated that *Prussian* subjects holding these notes should be paid in full. This went on for three years; but in 1748, Frederick, yielding to the remonstrances of the Elector, forbade his subjects to purchase these notes or to bring them into the Prussian kingdom at all. Such notes it was, which on this fatal November 23, 1750, a cunning M. de Voltaire commissioned Hirsch to purchase, and then to sell again in Saxony, receiving of course their full nominal value. To effect this purchase, Voltaire gave Hirsch negotiable bills worth 2,500*l*.

One of these bills was a draft on Voltaire's Paris banker for 1,600*l*., 'not payable for some weeks.' Bill two was a draft for 650*l*. by old father Hirsch—or Hirschell, as Voltaire called him—on Voltaire himself. In exchange for these two bills, Voltaire held the borrowed jewels.

There is nothing more remarkable about Voltaire considered in his character of a literary man, than the fact that he was always speculating, and except on this occasion, hardly ever unsuccessfully. But a court is no place for a secret. By November 29 some rumour of his guest's little affair had reached Frederick. On December 1 that procrastinating Hirsch had not even started on his journey to Dresden. Hirsch is pretty cool about the whole business, it appears, and not inclined to hurry himself. Voltaire's dancing, agitated impatience spurs him off at last. From December 1 to 12 he is in Dresden—delaying, making excuses and cashing never a Saxon note. (All he *did* do was to raise money on the Paris draft for 1,600*l*. Voltaire had given him, and trade on his own account.)



Voltaire entirely loses his temper, stops the payment of that draft on his Paris banker, and summons Hirsch home at once. He comes. Still pretty cool is Mr. Hirsch. Rather injured, if anything, in fact. It is not pleasant, M. de Voltaire, 'to have sold a bill of exchange which the drawer protested;' and that is what happened to me about that Paris draft of yours! I have the paper now—entirely worthless of course. But M. Hirsch takes care to keep it very securely all the same. For a Hirsch to have such a document signed Arouet de Voltaire may be rather an awkward thing for the King's visitor; and so, a profitable one for a Hirsch, as giving him a hold over his client. He has, or fancies he has, the whip hand of M. de Voltaire, who cannot make himself very disagreeable, thinks Hirsch, since the whole affair is illegal and under the rose.

On December 16, Voltaire, come to Berlin with King and Court for the Christmas carnival, receives Hirsch. The two draw up a document, 'a complete settlement.' Hirsch gives back Voltaire his unused drafts 'and expressly engages to return the bill upon Paris.' Voltaire, in exchange, is to buy some of the Hirsch jewels he holds, and to give Hirsch the expenses of his journey and 'compensation' for his time and trouble. The dangerous affair is at an end. M. de Voltaire supposes he has done with it for ever. He and Hirsch part satisfied. Then Hirsch discovers that Voltaire considers 9*l.* compensation sufficient. The Jew does not. Voltaire consults another money-lender, Ephraim, the enemy of the house of Hirsch, who tells him the jewels he holds are not worth what Hirsch said they were. 'Then you must have changed them,' says Hirsch. That is the declaration of war.

Until the Christmas Day of that 1750, daily stormy

meetings between Hirsch and Voltaire took place in Voltaire's room in the palace. Voltaire was convinced the Jew meant to extract money from him by means of the Paris bill: and return that bill Hirsch would not. No one who remembers the character of a youthful and middle-aged Arouet will be in the least surprised to hear that an Arouet of fifty-six chased the Jew round the room at last, shook his fist in his face, pushed him out of the door in a rage, and banged it after him like a passionate child.

The 'final total explosion' took place at a meeting at 'brave Major Chasot's' lodging when the *vif* infuriated Voltaire sprang at Hirsch's throat and sent him sprawling.

The affair had been noised abroad. If Hirsch still thought—and he did still think—that it would be so singularly unpleasant and impolitic for Voltaire to have the transaction made public and that he would submit to any indignity rather than to that catastrophe, he had mistaken his man. He had reckoned without the marvellous imprudence, mettle, and vivacity of the enemy of Rohan and Desfontaines and Boyer. Here was he who never made a compromise, and in his whole life never once bought peace by submitting to be cheated.

The fuse had been put to the gunpowder: and on December 30 came a shock which startled Europe.

The great Voltaire, the guest of the King of Prussia, *versus* Messrs. Hirsch & Son, Jew money-lenders of Berlin! Here was a *cause célèbre* with a vengeance!

Voltaire was quite as active and excited as he had been in the affair Desfontaines. He engaged the best counsel he could get. On January 1, 1751, he obtained a warrant to throw old Hirsch into prison for wrongly

detaining papers belonging to M. de Voltaire. Hirsch was released therefrom in a few days on bail—and the lawsuit began.

To unravel the truth from that complex tissue of lies has been the effort of all Frederick's and of all Voltaire's biographers. None have wholly succeeded. The case is infinitely intricate. The Hirsches lied very freely, and were inartistic enough not always to adhere to the same lie. It has been seen that though Voltaire preferred truth and honesty (which is already something) *he* was not above lying—when there was necessity. *His* case, in brief, was 'I *lent* Hirsch money to help his business at Dresden in fur and jewels.' (This was the pretext on which the Jew had undertaken the journey.) 'Some diamonds I took from him in part payment are not worth what he said they were; and he illegally retains my draft on my Paris banker, and has not kept to the agreement he signed.'

Hirsch's case was 'M. de Voltaire *sent* me to Dresden to deal in Saxon notes for him. The diamonds I gave him *were* worth what I said. He has changed them for diamonds of less value. The agreement he produces, signed by me, was altered by him to his advantage, after I had signed it.'

Documents were produced on both sides. That famous paper of agreement which Hirsch had signed and of which he now accused Voltaire of altering the wording, after he, Hirsch, had signed it, has been reproduced in facsimile.

It proves nothing. The document *has* been palpably altered. But who is to say if those illiterate and careless alterations were made before, or after, Hirsch had signed it? If after, then Voltaire was the most blundering and ignorant of forgers. But those early



chafing months in a notary's office must have given a shrewd head such as his a knowledge of law and legal documents which would have made him a better swindler than this forgery proves him. Voltaire's cleverness, not his virtue, exonerates him from that crime.

The man's mind was on the rack while the case lasted. His fury against the Hirsches blinded him to the folly and indignity of having been drawn into such a suit at all. 'I was piqued. I was mad to prove I had been cheated,' he wrote penitently afterwards. Wretched old Hirsch died during the progress of the trial—of a broken heart, said his son pathetically. King Frederick preserved a very ominous silence indeed. His guest's health was miserable. He had a fever—of the soul—and Berlin and Paris were watching, as at a play.

On February 18, 1751, the case was decided in favour of Voltaire. Hirsch was condemned on every count with which Voltaire had charged him. The purpose for which Voltaire had advanced the money was not, said the court shrewdly, the court's business. But all the waiting and watching world knew what that purpose had been, and so did the waiting and watching Frederick. Hirsch was to restore the Paris exchange bill. The diamonds were to be valued 'by experienced jewellers on their oaths.' Voltaire's seizure of the person of Hirsch was declared just and right. As to the famous agreement, Hirsch was fined ten thalers for denying he had signed it; and Voltaire was to make an affidavit that he had not changed its wording.

It is said that he asked upon what book he was to take his oath, and when he was answered 'The Bible,' cried, 'What, on that book written in such bad Latin! Now if it were only Homer or Virgil!' If the story is



true, it was but a flash of the old mocking spirit. Voltaire was in no mood for jesting. He had won, it is true. But his victory was a sorry one.

It was such a sorry one that the unlucky victor had perforce to go about congratulating himself loudly thereon, if only to make other people congratulate him too. Even now, the settlement was not complete.

The jewels had to be valued. That would take time. Voltaire was worn body and soul by a case which had kept him at a fever heat of passion from December 1, 1750, until this February 18, 1751. And in a deadly silence the King sat aloof in a rage. Voltaire's friends implored him to end an affair which had been degrading to everyone concerned in it. And at last he did come to some sort of compromise with the determined Hirsch. A few minor points appear to have been still undecided as late as the December of 1751.

Throughout a whole three months Frederick had uttered never a word.

His attitude towards this case was at once natural and justifiable. It was a poor, mean, despicable business at the best. Kingly hands, of all hands in the world, if they touch pitch are defiled therewith. Frederick shut ears and eyes to the shriekings and the cheatings of this pair of low money-lenders—and his guest. At first, indeed, his fury with that guest had got the better of him. On January 12, 1751, the King of France announced at his levee that the King of Prussia had dismissed Voltaire. Angry Frederick *had* turned to Darget, saying 'Write and tell him that he is to be out of my dominions in four-and-twenty hours.' Well for Voltaire that he had cultivated the friendship of the discreet secretary! Darget pleaded for him. 'Wait till the case is tried, Sire! If he is guilty, then

will be time enough to send him away.' Frederick agreed ; but during January and February they never met. Voltaire was for the most part in Berlin, and the King at Potsdam : but sometimes they were in the same palace divided by a few planks of wood—and the Jew lawsuit.

The versatility of Voltaire had hardly ever been better exemplified than by the fact that during this very December and January when rage and anxiety were tearing him to pieces, and he was breathlessly waiting the judgment of his case, he was play-acting with the princesses in Berlin exactly as if nothing were happening, and as if he were in full favour with the King. On January 5 'Zaire' was acted and Voltaire played Lusignan as he had done in happier days at Madame de Fontaine Martel's: the Princess Amelia was 'Zaire'; the Princes Henry and Frederick also took parts; and the Queen was enchanted. 'The Death of Cæsar' was also acted, and other plays. Throughout the winter too Voltaire gave audiences to great persons: and received marshals, princes, statesmen, and nobles.

Yet, through it all, the man was appealing passionately to the King by Darget. 'Throw yourself at the King's feet and obtain for me that I may retire to the Marquisat' (a country house near Potsdam). 'My soul is dead and my body dying.'

When he was not drawing tears from the spectators in that moving part of the old father, tears of rage and bitterness were very near his own eyes. 'It is not sufficient to be courageous,' he said himself; 'one must have distractions.' He had need of them if any man had.

On January 22 the King summed up the case to the Margravine of Bayreuth as 'the affair of a rascal

who is trying to cheat a sharper. . . . The suit is in the hands of justice, and in a few days we shall know who is the greater scoundrel of the two.' On January 30 Voltaire himself wrote to the Margravine with a very wry face: 'Brother Voltaire is here in disgrace. He has had a dog of lawsuit with a Jew, and, according to the law of the Old Testament, he will have to pay dearly for having been robbed.'

Then Voltaire wrote direct to the King and pleaded and argued with him personally. Only receive me into favour and I will anger you no more! And on February 2 Frederick wrote again to the Margravine, softened not at all; and *she* wrote on February 18 to her friend Voltaire: 'Apollo at law with a Jew! Fie then! that's abominable.' Then Voltaire appealed again to Frederick. 'All the genius of our modern Solomon could not make me feel my fault more than my heart feels it.'

Finally Solomon *did* give Apollo that Marquisat he had asked for; and Voltaire's 'quarrel with the Old Testament,' as he called it, being settled, the King wrote to him icily on February 24 from Potsdam: 'D'Arnaud had done nothing. It was because of you he had to go. . . . You have had the most detestable affair in the world with a Jew. It has made a frightful scandal. . . . If you can make up your mind to live like a philosopher I shall be glad to see you.' If not . . . 'you may as well stay in Berlin.'

On February 27 Voltaire replied, volubly explaining, regretting, apologising. He owned himself in the wrong with a candour and humility rather engaging.

'I have committed a great fault. I ask pardon of your Majesty's philosophy and goodness. . . . Do with



me what you will.' His health was suffering dreadfully at the time. 'The winter kills me'—especially the winter of our discontent. Even hard work at 'Louis XIV.' could not make him forget that. He pleaded very hard indeed.

On February 28 Frederick accorded a cold permission to him to come to Potsdam if he would.

By March 11 he was established at the Marquisat with, as he said, 'pills and pill-boxes' and the fifth canto of a poem by King Frederick entitled 'The Art of War.'

The King no doubt had missed Voltaire's conversation. He had missed too his brilliant, delightful, inconsequent, unreliable personality. The old subtle charm drew the two men together—in spite of themselves, and the imprudence of their connection. They were sure to quarrel! But, like many a lover and his mistress, they were dying to see each other, if it were only to discover fresh reasons for disagreement. 'I have committed a folly,' wrote Voltaire to Madame Denis, 'but I am not a fool.' He was something so infinitely removed from a fool that his living touch of genius alone could raise, if anything could raise, Frederick's poems from a dead mediocrity and the dreadful limbo of dullness. 'To the Prussians' and 'The Art of War' were very important factors in the Treaty of Peace.

Very early in his stay in Prussia the indefatigable Voltaire had begun learning a little of the despised German language—of which, says Morley, he never knew more 'than was needed to curse a postillion.' To correct the King's works, he needed none. By October 28, 1750, he was busy overseeing the second edition of Frederick's history of his country, written in



French and entitled 'Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg,' and trying to modify the royal author's round abuse of his own grandfather. But Frederick only loved truth the better if it burnt. 'After all,' said Voltaire with a shrug of his lean shoulders, 'he is your grandfather, not mine ; do as you like with him.'

The critic was not generally so accommodating however. He was not a critic *pour rire*. He gave himself an enormous amount of work. He ran a thousand risks of offending his royal pupil. He cavilled at this, queried that, suggested endlessly. The manuscript of 'Aux Prussiens' is still extant, with remarks in Voltaire's little handwriting all over it. His minuteness and care were extraordinary. It would have been at least a hundred times easier for him to have praised lavishly and indifferently. Any author will accept flattery—on trust. It is only for blame and disagreement that the critic must give clear reason and proof ; and chapter and verse for his alterations and amendments. If Voltaire had been a toady and had not loved his art better than all monarchs, he would have wasted much less of his dearly prized time in 'rounding off a little the works of the King of Prussia.' His 'official fidelity, frankness, and rigorous strictness' are a high testimony to his character. 'The Art of War' is a much more ambitious work than 'To the Prussians' and was subjected to the same relentless criticism. The eager critic wanted, he said, to enable his royal master to do without his help. Sometimes Frederick would leave a wrong word purposely. 'We must give him the pleasure of finding some fault,' he wrote to Darget. But on the whole he accepted not only verbal emendations, but alterations of his very

opinions with a generosity and fairness which prove the true royalty of the royal soul. This quick, thorough, breathless, aggravating schoolmaster would be satisfied with nothing less than his pupil's best. If a man could be made a great writer without being born one, Frederick the Great's literary efforts would not be mouldering in the libraries to-day.

The reconciliation between the teacher and the taught seems for a while to have been complete. The worry of the Hirsch affair had made Voltaire really ill. But Frederick was all goodness to the sufferer. He had a room kept for his use at Sans-Souci. Formey records how one day he went to the Marquisat to call upon Voltaire and found him in bed. 'What is the matter with you?' 'Four mortal diseases' answers the invalid. 'Your eyes look nice and bright though,' says the ill-advised Formey, meaning consolation. 'And don't you know,' shouts the sick man with all his strength, 'that in scurvy people *die* with their eyes inflamed?' It must be conceded that though Voltaire never allowed his ailments to stop his work, he liked to have full credit for them, and took care never to be ill without impressing upon his friends that he was dying. All the same, he began to attend those gay, frugal, philosophical little suppers once more—and was once more permitted to dispense with the ponderous dinners. Yet once more too, except for that ill-health, the life here was all he dreamed it. Frederick wrote him little friendly notes—'I have just given birth to six twins. . . . The "*Henriade*" is engaged to be their godmother. Come to the father's room at six o'clock this evening'—the six twins being six cantos of 'The Art of War.' And Voltaire would answer, 'Sire, you have the cramp, and so have I; you love solitude, and

so do I.' The pair were again as lovers, in fact ; writing nothings, only for the sake of writing something. The winter was past, and the summer blossoming again.

The trip to Italy, postponed from the autumn of 1750, had been arranged to take place in this May of 1751, but was finally abandoned altogether ; partly on account of the Inquisition, but partly also, it may be surmised, because Frederick having found Voltaire again, was in no mind to lose him.

Through the summer host and guest were hard at work with their respective secretaries. Both knew at least one of the receipts for happiness. Prussia *was* heaven. Only—only—there was a delightful earth called Paris where d'Argental was doing his vigorous best to get the authorities to permit the performance of 'Mahomet'—an earth from which he wrote on August 6 of this 1751, one last, long, pleading appeal to Voltaire to return, while he could yet return, with honour. Madame Denis, resolved not to join her uncle in Prussia, added her entreaties. The foolish woman, who had had a *tendresse* for handsome young Baculard d'Arnaud in the days when he was her uncle's *protégé* in Paris, was now coquetting with a certain Marquis de Ximenès, or Chimenès, as Voltaire called him, and less minded than ever to leave the capital.

The wild La Mettrie, too, was for ever calling on Voltaire—volubly homesick for Paris himself. Voltaire would have gone, perhaps ; but in August his 'Louis XIV.' was actually in the press of Berlin, he had a hundred prospective engagements, and—he thought Frederick was his friend.

It was at the end of this same month of August that La Mettrie, calling on Voltaire, swore to him that he had heard Frederick say of him : 'I shall



want him at the most another year: one squeezes the orange and throws away the rind.' Voltaire would not believe the story. La Mettrie redoubled his oaths. Voltaire wrote the scene to Madame Denis on September 2 in his quick, vivid fashion. 'Do you believe it? Ought I to believe it . . . after sixteen years of goodness . . . when I am sacrificing all for him? . . . I shall be justly condemned for having yielded to so many caresses. . . . What shall I do? Ignore what La Mettrie has told me, tell nobody but you, forget it, wait?' If Voltaire thought he really could do these things, he could have known little of his own character. He did try to forget. But that rind of an orange! It rankled, it rankled. *Could* Frederick have said it? Impossible! But he had written the 'Anti-Machiavelli' and spilled blood in war like water; condoled piously with Darget and made an epigram on his wife; caressed d'Arnaud and ruined him. It made one thoughtful.

On September 30 'Mahomet' was successfully performed in Paris. That was another voice urging Voltaire to return.

'The orange rind haunts my dreams,' he wrote to Madame Denis again, on October 29. 'I try not to believe it. . . . We go to sup with the King and are gay enough sometimes. The man who fell from the top of a steeple and finding the falling through the air soft, said, "Good, provided it lasts," is not a little like I am.'

On November 11 the tale-bearer, La Mettrie, died from having consumed a whole *pâté* (composed of eagle and pheasant, lard, pork and ginger!) at Lord Tyrconnel's house. He would make mischief no more. But, then, he could not undo the mischief he had made. 'I should like to have asked La Mettrie when he was



dying,' Voltaire wrote sombrely to Madame Denis on Christmas Eve, 'about that rind of an orange. That good soul, about to appear before God, would not have dared to lie. There is a great appearance that he spoke the truth. . . . The King told me yesterday . . . that he would give me a province to have me near him. *That does not look like the rind of an orange.*'

Between doubting and hoping, mistrusting, fearing he knew not what, in health always wretched ('my distempers . . . make me utterly unfit for kings'), homesick, uneasy, longing at once to go away and to be persuaded to stay, Voltaire spent his second winter—in heaven. Hirsch had made the first something very like pandemonium. But there was life, interest, excitement in a fight. The dull anxiety, the ugly care to wake up to in the dead nights and the dark mornings—these were worse a thousand times. Well for Voltaire that now, even more than ever, he had to comfort him that best relief from all the fears, doubts, problems, and presentiments of life—hard work.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## THE QUARREL WITH MAUPERTUIS

IN December 1751 there appeared in Berlin, in two volumes octavo and anonymously, 'The Century of Louis XIV.' by Voltaire.

The earliest idea of it was conceived by a wild Arouet of twenty listening to personal recollections of the Sun King from the old Marquis de Saint-Ange at Fontainebleau.

Arouet had heard with his own ears the strange tales told in Paris at that monarch's death. In 1719, when he was five-and-twenty and falling in brief love with the exquisite Maréchale de Villars, her husband recounted him more anecdotes of that magnificent and miserable age. To write it had been a relief from Émilie's shrewish tongue and inconvenient emotions, at Cirey. It was Voltaire's 'chief employment' in that first lonely summer there, before she joined him. He worked hard at it in Brussels. He found in it consolation for his mistress's infidelity: and for her death. It involved him in an enormous amount of reading, and unparalleled labours in research. Since he came to Prussia, he hardly wrote a letter without alluding to it. He found in it balm for the wounds inflicted by a d'Arnaud, a Hirsch, and a king. As it drew nearer completion, his interest and excitement in it deepened daily. 'I am absorbed in Louis XIV.'

'I shall be the Historiographer of France in spite of envy.' Before the author had finished reading the proofs, a pirated edition of his work appeared in Holland and elsewhere. There was the usual scramble among the publishers for the profits. Voltaire appealed to Frederick; and wrote to Falkener, in English, trying, through him, to get a correct edition circulated in England. His efforts were astonishingly fruitless. An author had then not only no right to the moneys his brain had earned, but was not even allowed the privilege of correcting the work of that brain: and the more famous the author the worse his chances in both respects. No anonymity could conceal a Voltaire.

Boyer prohibited 'The Century of Louis XIV.' in France, and its circulation in that country was enormous. The first authorised edition printed in Berlin was sold out in a few days. Eight new editions appeared in eight months. In those times, when to be educated was a rich man's privilege and not a pauper's right, such a success was unique. That it was deserved is proved by the fact that it is still the most famous history of that reign.

Voltaire had written it, as he always wrote, as a free man. But this time he had written, as he did not always write, as a free man who has no desire to offend the prejudices of the slave-dealers. He himself loved the glitter of that Golden Age: its burning and shining lights of literary genius, and the glory it gave to France. So far as he could be true and tactful, he was tactful. He did not run amok at abuses with that 'strident laugh' which has been said to fill the eighteenth century, as he had run amok at them in that 'Voice of the Sage and the People'—and in a hundred of his writings a thousand times before. When he wrote the

latter part of the book in Prussia, it was in his mind always that he might some day—one day—soon—who could tell?—be not sorry to come back to France. If he could still tell the truth and not offend the Boyer! If any man could have done it, that man was Voltaire. There is no writer in the world who so well knows, if he chooses, how to put blame as if it were praise, to turn censure into a dainty compliment and to trick out harsh realities in a charming dress.

But Boyer loved lies like the father of them. Voltaire's reputation damned him in advance. Besides, did he not give the place of, and the witnesses to, that secret marriage of Louis XIV. and de Maintenon? How imprudent! Some patriots 'raised a noble clamour' against him for having praised Marlborough and Eugene, and a great party of churchmen condemned him for having gently laughed at Jansenism and Molinism.

The book was full of reason; that in itself was enough. 'My book is prohibited among my dear countrymen,' wrote Voltaire to Falkener on January 27, 1752, 'because I have spoken the truth.' And again, to President Hénault, 'I have tried to raise a monument to truth and my country, and I hope they will not take the stones of the edifice to stone me.' The style, too, of the book, that style which has kept it alive, fresh, and vigorous for a hundred and fifty years, made it offensive in the nostrils of the solemn and approved historians of the period who held that an author cannot be learned without being dull, and if he is readable can be by no means worth reading. 'Louis XIV.' is a bright example of Voltaire's own aphorism, 'A serious book should not be too seriously written.' Though he had spent years of his life, and



endless trouble and activity in gathering his information, he wrote with the same spontaneous life and vigour as he wrote the *contes* he read to the Duchesse du Maine and her gay court; with not less inspiration than he flung on to paper in the morning the 'Henriade' he had dreamt at night on his prison bed in the Bastille. In a word, 'I tried to move my readers, even in history.' His own countrymen now understand him better; but it is to be feared many of his foreign students still suspect the fidelity of his facts because he puts them so gracefully, and fear that a sense of humour and a sparkling style are incompatible with sound judgment and deep learning, and that if an historian is really clever he must prove it by being excessively dull.

The success of the book must have exceeded its author's eager hopes. It delighted England. D'Alembert, in his lodging over the glazier's shop, and all the nobility of intellect in Paris, rejoiced in it. What matter if the Court frowned? Pirated editions appeared in Edinburgh, as well as London, Prussia, and Holland. The publishers were scrambling wildly for the proceeds. The author did at last get something—and shrugged his shoulders and was not ill-satisfied. After all, he had a better success than a monetary one. Lord Chesterfield called the book 'the history of the human mind written by a man of genius.' Condorcet spoke of it as 'the only readable history of the age.' Hénault declared its author 'le plus bel esprit' of the century. 'Louis XIV.' excites men's curiosity at every page. If the author had been deprived of the Historiographership of France, he *was* the Historiographer not the less.

'Louis XIV.,' and correcting Frederick's works,

were not all of Voltaire's literary work in Prussia. He was always composing *bagatelles* and compliments for the two Queens and the Princesses. He wrote Frederick—in the room next to him—gay verses as well as many letters: and was also busy with his famous philosophical poem called 'Natural Law,' not published till 1756. He began here his great 'Philosophical Dictionary'; and was further fanning the flame, by innumerable suggestions, of that light-bringer of the eighteenth century, that torch in a darkness which could be felt, the 'Encyclopædia' of Diderot and d'Alembert. Its preface appeared in 1750 and its first volume in 1751. Voltaire called it 'the dictionary of the universe'—'the bureau of human learning,' and should have found in its splendid audacity—a quality so dear to his soul—an antidote for many afflictions. Perhaps he did. It was never because he had idle hands that Satan found them mischief still to do. But he was homesick. He was in that pitiable state of body which makes the mind irritable and despondent. Paris had been stormy enough. But here one lived always over a volcano. That orange rind rankled still. If one royal hand caressed, there was the other that might scratch at any moment. The never-sleeping anxiety affected Voltaire's *vif* temper, just as anxiety affects the temper of lesser persons. He was in a mood when he was sure to be offended by someone. This time the person was Maupertuis.

Born in 1698 in Saint-Malo, Maupertuis was four years younger than Voltaire, and in his precocious intelligence, ardent imagination, and unquenchable thirst for knowledge, not unlike him. But there the likeness stopped. Maupertuis studied in Paris, and then became that rare anomaly, a *savant*-soldier. He



MOREAU DE MAUPERTUIS.

*From an Engraving after a Painting by Tourmère.*





was also elected a member of the Academy of Sciences ; and in 1728 spent six months in England, where he was made a member of the Royal Society and imbibed Newtonian opinions. In 1740, after an Arctic expedition which roused much public interest, he was made by Frederick President of the Berlin Academy, that he might form it 'as you alone can form it.' Maupertuis married one of the Queen-Mother's maids of honour, and lived in a fine house in Berlin close to the Royal Park, which his zoological tastes led him to turn into a kind of menagerie. Precise, pompous, and positive ; boring society with his worrying exactness upon trifles even more than society bored him ; inordinately vain, and with a sensitive temper made yet more inflammable by brandy and self-love ; acutely conscious of his dignity, and without any sense of humour, the ex-tutor of Madame du Châtelet was the sort of person with whom, sooner or later, her lover was sure to disagree. Added to these facts, Voltaire's pension from King Frederick exceeded that of Maupertuis by two thousand crowns ; and while Maupertuis was socially dull, at the King's suppers Voltaire's conversation was even more brilliant than his writings.

On October 28, 1750, the naturalist Buffon had written to a friend, 'Between ourselves, Voltaire and Maupertuis are not made to live in the same room.'

The first tiff between the uncongenial pair took place, in point of fact, in that very October of 1750, the autumn after Voltaire's arrival in Prussia. There was a vacant chair in the Berlin Academy. Maupertuis wished it given to d'Argens—Voltaire, further seeing, to that Raynal, already his friend, afterwards the famous philosopher and historian. Voltaire won, with the help of Frederick ; and Maupertuis was left surly

and jealous. In the Hirsch affair Voltaire asked his help, and Maupertuis refused it. Maupertuis read 'Louis XIV.' and compared it to 'the gambols of a child'—heavy Maupertuis who could not have gambolled to save his soul.

Then, at the end of the year 1751, a certain book entitled 'Mes Pensées,' by a young French adventurer called La Beaumelle, made some little stir in Berlin. The 'Thoughts' were desultory, unequal, and very ill put together. D'Argenson wrote of the book that half of it was excellent, a quarter mediocre, and the other quarter bad. From the excellent part he quoted a shrewd axiom—'Happy the state where the king has no mistress, provided that he also has no confessor'! Two Berlin readers, at the least, included in the bad quarter this extraordinary sentence: 'There have been greater poets than Voltaire, but never one so well paid. . . . The King of Prussia overwhelms men of letters with kindness for precisely the same reasons that a little German prince overwhelms with kindness a jester or a buffoon.' The passage was the joke of one of the royal suppers. But if Frederick and Voltaire laughed at it, it was not the less a joke that left a taste in the mouth. Then up comes La Beaumelle to Berlin. On November 1, 1751, he calls on the great Voltaire; and Voltaire, though he asks him to dinner and wastes on him four hours of his time, treats him with a civil chilliness which surprises La Beaumelle, who appears to have no idea that Voltaire has seen those 'Pensées'; and attributes his cold manner to an indigestion.

La Beaumelle is much with Lord Tyrconnel, seeks to gain the good graces of Darget, perhaps even to sup with the King. He has owned to an admiration for

Maupertuis. Voltaire bethinks himself presently of a little ruse to rid his path of this bramble. 'Will you lend me your "Thoughts," M. Beaumelle?' Beaumelle lends the book; and after three days Voltaire returns it with the page containing the offensive remark upon himself and the King, turned down.

But La Beaumelle did not take the hint.

On December 7, 1751, the King and Voltaire arrived in Berlin from Potsdam, and foolish La Beaumelle went again to see Voltaire. He attempted to explain away that remarkable sentence. But it was hardly capable of a favourable interpretation. Voltaire, on La Beaumelle's own showing, behaved with self-control and dignity.

'Who showed the passage to the King?' says La Beaumelle.

'Darget,' answers Voltaire.

So La Beaumelle goes to Darget. 'You had better leave Berlin,' the prudent secretary advises. Then La Beaumelle seeks, and finds, better consolation in Maupertuis. 'Voltaire gave the passage an offensive interpretation,' says the President. 'Send the King a copy of your book.' But though La Beaumelle not only did this but addressed petitions to the King, he received no answer and was not invited to the suppers.

In a sentimental affair of La Beaumelle's, which was the next scene in his adventures, Voltaire took his enemy's part goodnaturedly enough, and did his best to get Beaumelle out of the prison into which an injured husband had thrown him. He had some reason for wishing to conciliate the foolish young man. La Beaumelle had in his possession autograph letters of Madame de Maintenon which would have been of infinite value to the author of 'The Century of



Louis XIV.' At their first interview Voltaire had asked to look at them ; and La Beaumelle had made excuses. The persevering Voltaire tried again and again to attain his aim ; and at last, after a furious interview, the two parted for ever, La Beaumelle crying bitterly that his hatred would long outlive Voltaire's verses. Voltaire had not obtained the de Maintenon letters ; and La Beaumelle, after leaving Berlin in May 1752, revenged himself on his enemy by bringing out a pirated edition of ' Louis XIV.' which positively ran parallel to Voltaire's own, and to which La Beaumelle added ' Remarks ' offensive to the author and dealing also, with a dangerous freedom, with the Royal Family of France.

To be sure, Voltaire was fair game ; but the House of Bourbon !

In a very little while M. La Beaumelle was expiating his imprudence in prison.

Throughout the affair Voltaire seems only to have taken offence, and the audacious Beaumelle to have given it. He was nothing after all. He might rot in the Bastille and be forgotten. He had no significance, except that Maupertuis defended him.

In the spring of 1752, while the affair of the ' Pensées ' was amusing Berlin, events of importance to Voltaire had occurred both in Paris and in the King's *entourage* in Berlin.

On February 24, ' Rome Sauvée,' much altered and improved by its author, was successfully performed in Paris through the exertions of d'Argental and Madame Denis. The niece, not content with superintending Uncle Voltaire's plays, had written one herself called ' The Punished Coquette.' Voltaire was in agonies for fear the thing should be a failure ; but his feelings were spared and it was not performed.



On March 2 Lord Tyrconnel died in Berlin, and on March 4 Darget left the King's service; nominally, and perhaps in part really, for his health's sake. But he was glad to go, and he came back no more. Voltaire lost in him a very faithful friend. 'I ought to go too,' he wrote thoughtfully.

Then Longchamp had been triumphantly discovered by Madame Denis committing the unpardonable sin of copying his master's manuscripts with two accomplices who had been servants in the employ of Madame du Châtelet. Madame Denis abused him for her own satisfaction, and exposed him for his master's.

Was it only because Longchamp knew too much and had in his possession dangerous writings which were more likely to be coaxed than to be scolded out of him, that his master wrote to him very gently and offered pardon in return for the truth? The goodness and generosity which made all his servants love him must have had some foundation in fact. On March 30 of this 1752 Longchamp replied penitently and burnt the copies he had made. Voltaire gave him a handsome sum of money over and above the wages due to him, and Longchamp became a map and chart dealer. Twenty-six years later he came to see his old master, when he was on his last visit to Paris.

But the danger that Longchamp's perfidy had threatened had been no light one to the man who had already begun to look on that very sensitive and touchy French capital as a possible refuge, and was soon to find Prussia too hot to hold him.

Before the end of the year 1751 Frederick had begun to intercept and keep copies of Voltaire's and Madame Denis's letters. Voltaire wrote bitterly that the Golden Key tore his pocket, that the ribbon of the Order was a

halter round his neck, that nothing in Prussia gave him a grain of happiness. 'I have lost my teeth and my five senses,' he wrote on February 6, 1752, 'and the sixth is leaving me at a gallop. I doubt if even "Rome Sauvée" will save *me*.' He was sick now with such a home-sickness as only a Frenchman knows. All these things, taken together, doubled his natural imprudence.

Before La Beaumelle left Berlin in May had begun a quarrel, into which Voltaire was to plunge headlong, between Maupertuis and the mathematician Koenig, who had stayed and worked for two years with Madame du Châtelet at Cirey.

Koenig was a member of the Berlin Academy and a strong partisan of Leibnitz, as Voltaire and Maupertuis were of Newton; but was all the same a warm friend and admirer of Maupertuis, whom in September 1750 he had visited in Berlin. It was not unnatural that when these two partisans came to discuss Leibnitz and Newton they should quarrel. They did quarrel. Koenig, however, apologised handsomely to the touchy President, and returned to Holland where he lived. There he wrote an essay on the subject of their dispute--the principle of the least action--or the theory, which Maupertuis claimed to have discovered, that Nature is a great economist and works with the fewest materials with which she can possibly attain her purpose. Koenig disproved this theory, and quoted in his support a letter written by his dear Leibnitz. He submitted the essay to Maupertuis, who apparently did not read it, for he sanctioned its publication, and it appeared in March 1751, in Latin. Then Maupertuis did read it, and was deeply offended. Produce these letters of Leibnitz from which you quote, M. Koenig! I am certain Leibnitz is of *my* opinion

in the matter! Produce the originals! But only copies and not the original letters were forthcoming. They were undoubtedly genuine. Every page bore the unmistakable stamp of the Leibnitzian style. But there are none so blind as those who won't see.

On April 13, 1752, Maupertuis, as President, called together a meeting of the Academy, and caused Koenig to be expelled therefrom as a forger.

Then Voltaire, hard at work at Potsdam, looked up from his books, thrust aside La Beaumelle, Darget, and those home worries of Madame Denis and Longchamp, and must needs go down to the shore just to see the storm coming up and wet his imprudent feet a little in the surf. 'I am not yet well informed,' he wrote to Madame Denis on May 22, 'as to the details of the beginning of this quarrel. Maupertuis is at Berlin, ill from having drunk a little too much brandy.' Soon after June 8 the Berlin Academy, to which Koenig had appealed, ratified its shameful sentence. By now Voltaire at Potsdam was chafing and snorting to get into the battle. There were so many spurs to urge him there! One day he had been giving a dinner party at which Maupertuis was a guest. Voltaire airily complimented the President on a pamphlet he had written on Happiness—Voltaire having really found 'Happiness' very dry and depressing. 'It has given me great pleasure—a few obscurities excepted—which we will discuss later.' 'Obscurities!' cries the touchy President. 'Only for you, Sir!' And Voltaire, with his lean hand on the presidential shoulder and his eyes uncommonly bright and malicious, answers, 'Je vous estime, mon Président; you want to fight—you shall. In the meantime, let us go to dinner.'

On July 24 he wrote Madame Denis another little



story. Maupertuis had said that the King having sent Voltaire his verses to correct, Voltaire had cried 'Will he never leave off giving me his dirty linen to wash?' And Maupertuis had told the anecdote, 'in the strictest confidence,' to ten or twelve people. The King had heard of it, of course. Then, after the death of La Mettrie, had not Maupertuis declared that Voltaire had said that the post of the King's Atheist was vacant? True, *that* story did not reach the King. But every story was a whip to goad Voltaire into the forefront of the fray. He hated tyranny and wrong wherever he found them. But being human, and chafing and longing to fight with him, he hated Maupertuis' tyranny above other persons. On September 18, there appeared an anonymous pamphlet defending Koenig and entitled 'A Reply from an Academician of Berlin to an Academician of Paris.' It was supposed to be from the pen of Voltaire—the first arrow from his quiver. A few days later Koenig produced his own 'Appeal to the Public,' which easily proves his case to any fair-minded person. There was one man, however, who meant to stand by his President, as his President, and to defend him right or wrong. King Frederick would not even read Koenig's 'Appeal.' By October 15 he had himself produced a 'Letter to the Public,' which was nothing, said Voltaire, but an attack on Koenig and all his friends. 'He calls those friends fools, jealous, and dishonest.' Voltaire wrote an account of the thing to his niece, in which he spoke out as only a Voltaire could speak. In the letter are these ominous words: 'Unluckily for me, I also am an author, and in the opposite camp to the King. *I have no sceptre, but I have a pen.*'

Then Maupertuis produced an extraordinary series



of letters which certainly do not read like the composition of a sane person. He advocated in them the maddest scientific schemes, such as blowing up one of the Pyramids with gunpowder to see why they were built ; and making an immense hole in the earth to find out what it contains.

In a preface he had very unpromisingly stated that he should follow no sequence or order, but write on the impulse of the moment, and no doubt contradict himself ! Voltaire wrote that Maupertuis had previously been in a lunatic asylum and was now mad. It did seem as if drink and vanity had turned the poor wretch's brain. But Frederick stood by his President ; and on November 5, while recommending him rest and repose, gravely congratulated him on his book.

On November 17, from that room looking on to the terrace at Sans-Souci, Voltaire wrote a letter to Koenig, easy, graceful, and not exactly impolite to Maupertuis, but explaining that that solemn Infallibility had been in the wrong. As for those twenty-three scientific letters, why, one must pity, not blame, him for them. And no doubt, M. Koenig, the same mental misfortune which made him write them, inspired his conduct to you !

It was a dainty glove thrown down ; but it was a declaration of war not the less.

Frederick was far too shrewd and sane a person not to know very well who had right and reason on his side in such a dispute. He and Voltaire continued to meet as friends, and supped together as of old. Now Tyrconnel and La Mettrie were dead, Darget gone away, and Maupertuis too sick and sore to attend them, the suppers would have been small and dull indeed without Voltaire. He had been always the real soul of

them. At one, only this last September, the daring idea of 'The Philosophical Dictionary' had been started; and in a day or two he had sent the King that matchlessly audacious first article, 'Abraham,' which would have made the Pope laugh and might have made a Frederick forget that 'Reply from an Academician of Berlin' which Voltaire had written, under a thinly veiled anonymity, but a few days earlier. But though the chain which bound the royal Damon to his Pythias still held, it was weak in every link. Voltaire declared of himself that he was a hundred years old—that the suppers were suppers of Damocles—the world a shipwreck—'sauve qui peut!' He was, in fact, too wretched to fear anything, and so ready to dare all. There was a pause. The tiger crouched a moment before it sprang, and then leapt on Maupertuis in the 'Diatribes of Doctor Akakia.'

There is no more scathing and burning satire in literature. The deadly minuteness of Swift's malign and awful irony is not so terrible as the pungent mockery of this jester who laughed, and laughed; looked up and saw his victim writhing and mad with impotent rage, and held his sides and laughed the more. The great English-Irishman at least paid his victims the compliment of taking them in some sort seriously; of bringing great and terrible weapons to slay them; and gave them the poor satisfaction of feeling like martyrs if they wished. But Voltaire made Maupertuis a byword and a derision: the sport of fools, the laughing-stock of Europe: a buffoon, a jest, a caricature: such that men seeing, stopped, beheld open-mouthed, and then laughed to convulsions. Akakia means guilelessness; and Akakia is a physician who takes the remarkable effusions of Maupertuis with a serious innocence, very

deadly; who asks the most simple questions in the world; and turns upon the President's theories the remorseless logic of the gayest and easiest common-sense. Read a hundred and fifty years after, when of necessity many allusions must be missed and the point of many a jest be lost, 'Akakia' is still one of the wittiest productions in the French language.

There could have been no style better than Voltaire's for making Pomposity mad. One can still see the 'sublime Perpetual President' writhing under that pitiless mockery and that infectious laugh of malicious delight. The wickedest, cleverest little picador in all the world goaded this great, lumbering, heavy-footed old bull to impotent frenzy. The lithe tiger, agile as a cat, sprang on his foe, showing all his teeth in his grin, and, grinning still, tore him limb from limb.

'I have no sceptre,' Voltaire had said, 'but I have a pen.' He had indeed.

Before that mild letter to Koenig was written from Sans-Souci on November 17, the first part of 'Akakia' had been finished. But if nothing could stop a man writing imprudence, under the absolute monarchy of Prussia there was everything to stop him printing it. Trickery was in Voltaire's blood; and practice had made him perfect in the art. Frederick had dealt treacherously with him; so why not he with Frederick? He went to the King, and read aloud a pamphlet he had written on Lord Bolingbroke. Will his Majesty sign the royal permission for that pamphlet to be printed? By all means. Frederick signs the last page of the manuscript. Voltaire sends it to the printers; asks for it back, to make some trifling alterations, and puts 'Akakia' in front of Bolingbroke. What more simple?



It only remained to get a few printed copies sent out of Prussia, and then one could face destiny bravely. One story runs that Frederick, who heard everything, got wind of this 'Akakia,' and that Voltaire, armed with the manuscript, brought it to the King; and the King, who loved wit very nearly but not quite so much as he loved his own greatness, laughed till he cried. How should a Frederick the Great, with his bitter humour, not laugh at a Maupertuis thus ridiculed by a Voltaire? Under the rose, one could laugh at anything—God, man, or devil—even one's own Perpetual President. If those 'Matinées du Roi de Prusse, écrites par lui-même' are genuine, Frederick stands proven as one of the most accomplished actors on the world's stage. 'One must think according to the rank he occupies,' says he. So he laughed 'to dislocation' and added that there must be no publishing of such a wicked, delightful, malignant document—and then laughed afresh. Voltaire flung the manuscript on the fire, as a proof of good faith. He could afford to be thus generous. Frederick rescued the papers, says the story, and burnt his sleeve. And the friends parted, still vastly entertained—and each pair of clever eyes looking into the other pair—wondering—wondering——.

The anecdote, though it is recorded by two different persons and is picturesque, is, however, of doubtful veracity. The more probable truth is that Frederick, first discovering on November 20 that 'Akakia' had been printed at Potsdam by his own printers and in his own printing office, and on the strength of the permit signed by himself, was furiously enraged. He sent off Fredersdorff—his servant, valet, friend—post-haste both to the printer, who confessed all, and to the author;



and warned the author, who simply denied everything as usual, of awful consequences to follow.

Then Frederick wrote Voltaire that famous letter, very badly spelt, which under the circumstances was not immoderate. 'Your effrontery astonishes me. . . . Do not imagine that you will make me believe that black is white. . . . If you persist in going on with the business I will print everything, and the world will see that if your works merit statues, your conduct deserves chains.'

And the irate host put, it is said, a sentinel outside the guest's door.

Voltaire wrote his answer on the foot of Frederick's letter and continued to deny everything. The whole thing is a hideous calumny, and I am very ill! But Frederick was not moved; and the sentinel was not moved either. Fredersdorff was sent to Voltaire again—this time bearing with him the signed confession of the printer. Then the crafty Voltaire thought he had better turn the matter into a joke. A joke! On November 27 Frederick wrote out for him a very elaborate promise to be a good boy. Voltaire did not sign it. He wrote beneath it, calling attention to its weak points instead. But, not the less, Frederick, on November 29, was able to console Maupertuis with the news that Voltaire had been forced to give up the whole edition of the 'Diatribes' which had been solemnly burnt in the royal presence. He had also been forbidden to print the thing elsewhere. So, poor, mad, beaten Perpetual President, you can be at peace!

After an 'arrest' of eight days the sentinel was removed from Voltaire's door. He had behaved abominably. But he was very amusing—and so still infinitely worth having.

On December 10 the King announced comfortably to Maupertuis, 'The affair of the libels is over. . . . I have frightened Voltaire on the side of his purse (by the threat of a fine), and the result is as I expected.' Before December 16 the Court came up to Berlin for Christmas. Voltaire lodged at a friend's house, the house of M. de Francheville, whose son he employed as a temporary secretary. There seems no doubt he would have been again of that *société intime*, the suppers—but for one little event.

One edition of 'Akakia' had been burnt; but M. de Voltaire had known very well it was not the only one. King and Court had hardly arrived at Berlin, when lo and behold! 'Akakias' spring up all over it as quickly and plentifully as mushrooms and to be far longer lived.

Berlin hated Maupertuis and enjoyed 'Akakia' as it had never enjoyed anything before. The neat, staid town went mad with laughter and delight. And in his lodgings the father of 'Akakia' looked thoughtfully to the future. 'The orange has been squeezed—one must think now how to save the rind.' The words were written to Madame Denis on December 18, and Voltaire, with the scales fallen at last from the sharpest eyes that ever man had, added his 'little dictionary as used by kings.'

*'My friend means my slave.'*

*'My dear friend means I am more than indifferent to you.'*

*'For I will make you happy read I will endure you as long as I have use for you.'*

*'Sup with me to-night means I shall mock at you this evening.'*

Voltaire might well feel that that three years'

dream was over, and that it remained only 'to desert honestly.'

On the afternoon of the Christmas Eve of 1752, Collini, that intelligent young Italian who had seen Voltaire at the Carrousel at the giddy height of glory and had now become his secretary, was standing at the window of his master's lodgings. There was a great crowd in the street, watching a fine bonfire. Italian Collini did not understand the meaning of the scene. But Voltaire, with his rich experience, knew in a flash. 'I'll bet it's my Doctor!' said he.

It was.

## CHAPTER XXIV

## THE FLIGHT FROM PRUSSIA

WITH the exception of the Hirsch affair there is no episode in Voltaire's life about which so many statements (usually conflicting) have been made as about the quarrel with Maupertuis and Voltaire's flight from Prussia. Collini wrote *his* version of the story. Prussia naturally has its own. Voltaire has *his* own. All the Lives of Voltaire and of Frederick—French, English, and German—have their versions. To quote authorities for every statement is the general custom of the biographer. But the sifting for truth is surely a process which may be well carried on behind the scenes ; and then the result of that sifting given clear and clean to the public. If the public cannot trust the ability or the honesty of the biographer, the sources of his information are not inaccessible, and the public with a little extra trouble can verify his facts, even though he does not assist it by cumbering his text with that annihilation of all interest, the perpetual footnote. If the subject is not considered worth the extra trouble, the reader may well take the biographer—on faith. It may be added that the custom of learning a man's life and character from other people and not from himself, is far too closely followed. After all, the great do not tell so many lies about themselves as their too partial friends,



their malicious enemies, and their interested, gossiping servants tell about them. The best biographer of Voltaire is Voltaire himself. If any writer can lead his reader to throw away the biographies, even his own, and study Voltaire at first-hand—his letters, the wittiest in the world, and his works, which in matchless adroitness can be compared to no other production of the human mind—he will have done much and should be well satisfied.

The light of that Christmas bonfire made ‘Akakia,’ as it might have been expected to make it, more conspicuous than ever. Thirty thousand copies were sold in Paris in a few weeks. By January 1753, in Prussia, twelve presses were kept busy printing it night and day. The Prussian newspapers held up their hands at it in holy horror, and did their best for it by their abuse. For a week Voltaire lay *perdu*. He had thoughts of escaping to Plombières on the very good excuse of his health. A flight to England was often in his mind.

On New Year’s Day, at half-past three in the afternoon, he sent back to Frederick ‘the bells and the baubles he has given me,’ which comprised the Cross and Ribbon of the Order of Merit and the Chamberlain’s Key.

On the outside of the packet he wrote the well-known quatrain :

Oh ! tenderly I took your tender gifts  
And sadly render them to you again,  
As bitter lover to lost love gives back  
Her pictured image, in his hot heart’s pain.

He accompanied the parcel with a letter—a melancholy reflection on the Vanity of Human Wishes. ‘My resignation is equal to my sorrow. I shall remember nothing but your goodness. I have lost every-

thing ; there only remains to me a memory of having once been happy in your retreat at Potsdam. . . . I made you my idol : an honest man does not change his religion, and sixteen years of a measureless devotion are not to be destroyed by a single unlucky moment.'

His sorrow was genuine ; but so was his determination to go.

At four o'clock on this afternoon a *fiacre* drew up at the door of his rooms. Fredersdorff had come from the King, bringing back the Order and Key. There was a long consultation. Collini, who was apparently eavesdropping in the next room, said his master only consented to receive them again after a very lively argument. The King's Chamberlain, in fact, made a very wry face at finding himself his Chamberlain still. Go he would ; but go with peace and honour he certainly would if he could. On January 2 he wrote his King a conciliatory letter. 'Do with me what you will,' it said. 'But what in the world *will* you do with me?' it *meant*. As for the suppers—I will be of them no more.

On January 18 Voltaire published a declaration denying the authorship of 'Akakia.' It was a form—hardly a deceit, in that it deceived nobody. It was to oblige the King—the King who still hungered and thirsted for his Voltaire and could not let him go. True, it was a humble, obedient, penitent, reformed Voltaire he wanted—in short, an impossibility.

Frederick went back to Potsdam on January 30, and begged his Chamberlain to come back there too, to his old quarters.

'I am too ill,' says the Chamberlain, but inconsistently pleased with the friendly offer and taking care to have it recorded in the newspapers, and to tell it to all

his correspondents in Paris. Still, in the very letters in which he announced the King's favour like a pleased child, the shrewd man was arranging to leave. On February 16 he was still at Berlin with dysentery. His royal host sent him quinine. But that did not cure him. Nothing would cure him but some air which was not Prussian air—some diet which the kingly table could not produce—some company which was not Prussian company.

He could not go to Potsdam; but about March 1 he wrote to beg formal permission for leave of absence, to journey to French Plombières and take there the waters which were much recommended for his complaints. He awaited the answer with a feverish impatience. He made Collini arrange his papers and pack his things. Here was a book to be returned to the royal library; then, there were the coming expenses to be considered. But no answer came from Frederick. Voltaire, restless and irritable, must needs, on March 5, move from the rooms he occupied in a house in central Berlin to another in the Stralau quarter—almost in the country. Here he lived at his own expense with Collini, a manservant, and a cook. His doctor, Coste, came to see him—Coste, who was not afraid to say Plombières was the only cure for his patient's health, though he knew the recommendation would be displeasing to the King.

What if the King refused permission? Such things had been done by men of his temperament, and might be done again.

Voltaire would walk in the garden of that Stralau house with young Collini. 'Now leave me to dream a little,' he would say. And he paced up and down alone—conjecturing, fearing, scheming. He *must* go



somehow. He invented the wildest, absurdest plans of escape; and laughed at them gaily enough with that capacity for seeing the humorous side of the worst troubles, which was the best gift the gods had given him.

At last Frederick broke his silence; and Voltaire wrote to his niece on March 15 that the King had said there were excellent waters in Moravia! 'He might as well tell me to go and take waters in Siberia.'

Not the least curious of the many human documents preserved in the archives of Berlin is that famous dismissal which at last, on March 16, 1753, Frederick the Great flung upon paper in a rage.

'He can quit my service when he pleases: he need not invent the excuse of the waters of Plombières; but he will have the goodness, before he goes, to return to me the contract of his engagement, the Key, the Cross, and the volume of poetry I have confided to him. I would rather he and Koenig had only attacked my works; I sacrifice *them* willingly to people who want to blacken the reputation of others; I have none of the folly and vanity of authors, and the cabals of men of letters appear to me the depth of baseness.'

The Abbé de Prades put that dismissal in a politer official form, and thus sent it to Voltaire. But this keen-sighted Arouet was not minded to be expelled like a schoolboy by an angry master. Wherever he might go, that master's iron arm could reach him. He wrote, therefore, a gay letter of entreaty to Prades, asking for a parting interview with the King. Permission was granted him. On March 18, after a stay of thirteen days at Stralau, Voltaire went to Potsdam. That evening he was once more installed in his old rooms at Sans-Souci.



The next day, after dinner, he and the King met in private, and once again met as more than friends. It has been said before that there was between these two men something of the glamour and the fitfulness of passion. 'I could live neither with you nor without you,' wrote Voltaire after they had long parted for ever. 'You who bewitched me, whom I loved, and with whom I am always angry.' That was the summing up of their whole relationship. The enchantment was at work again to-night. It is said that they talked over the Maupertuis affair. Collini affirms that they laughed at the President together. The harsh dismissal was altered into a gracious royal permit for a necessary change and holiday. Voltaire was to drink the waters, recover his health, and return. He was still the King's Chamberlain. He was to retain his Cross, his Key, and alas! alas!—the royal volume of poems. The interview lasted two hours. Voltaire came from it radiant and satisfied. For a week Potsdam laid herself out to delight him. Perhaps she and the King would be so charming, Voltaire would not want to leave them even for a time! Frederick may have hoped so. Voltaire submitted to the blandishments; nay, enjoyed them. But behind the bright eyes and the gay, vain, susceptible, pleasure-loving French heart lay the purpose and iron resolution which make greatness. Voltaire was going. On March 26, 1753, about eight o'clock in the morning he went on to the parade ground where Frederick was holding the last review of his regiment before he started for Silesia.

'Sire, here is M. de Voltaire who comes to take his orders.'

'Eh bien! M. de Voltaire, you are resolved then to set out?'

‘Sire, urgent business and my health make it necessary for me to do so.’

‘Monsieur, I wish you a pleasant journey.’

They never met again.

Voltaire hurried back to his rooms. Everything was ready for flight. Collini had arranged all money matters. The travelling carriage was at the door. Voltaire hastily wrote a brief farewell to d’Argens. By nine the travellers were *en route*. They never paused or looked back. By six o’clock in the evening of March 27 they had covered ninety-two miles of road, and were in the rooms prudent Voltaire had engaged in advance at Leipsic. Did he then recall and wonder at that strange tragi-comedy of the last three years? Whatever his lips uttered, his heart knew he had left Frederick for ever. The time had not yet come, though it did come, for regret, remorse, and affection.

Voltaire had brought with him in that travelling carriage two supplements to his ‘Doctor Akakia.’ Almost his last words from Potsdam, in a letter to Formey, were, ‘When I am attacked I defend myself like a devil; but I am a good devil and end by laughing.’ But it was better to be attacked by a Voltaire than to be mocked by him—which Maupertuis, when he read those supplements, once more knew to his cost.

On April 3 that very ill-advised person saw fit to write a threatening letter to Voltaire at Leipsic, in which he said, almost in so many words, If you attack me again, nothing shall spare you. ‘Be grateful to the respect and obedience which have hitherto withheld my arm and saved you from the worst affair you ever had.’

Voltaire’s answer was a new edition of ‘Akakia’ with the two supplements added, a travesty of the

letter he had just received from Maupertuis, and a burlesque epistle to Formey in his official character of Secretary of the Berlin Academy. If the first part of 'Akakia' had been laughable, the second was exquisitely ludicrous. It reached Frederick soon enough, as everything reached him.

On April 11 he wrote a very memorable and famous order to his Resident at Frankfort—one Freytag. The King commanded Freytag to demand of Voltaire, when he passed through Frankfort, the Chamberlain's Key, the Cross and Ribbon of the Order of Merit, every paper in his Majesty's handwriting, and a book 'specified in the note enclosed.' If Voltaire declined to do as he was told, he was to be arrested. On April 12 Frederick wrote to his sister of Bayreuth a letter wherein he spoke of his 'charming, divine Voltaire,' that 'sublime spirit, first of thinking beings,' as the greatest scoundrel and the most treacherous rascal in the universe; and said that men were broken on the wheel who deserved it less than he.

The Margravine confessed that, for the life of her, she had not been able to keep her countenance while reading that second part of 'Akakia'; but her brother was in no laughing mood. To soothe Maupertuis he had caused his curt dismissal to Voltaire of March 16 to appear in the newspapers. 'Akakia' may be fairly said to have been one of the most famous jokes of the eighteenth century, and to have been the delight of every person who read it, save only Maupertuis and Frederick the Great.

For two-and-twenty days Voltaire passed his time not unhappily at Leipsic. He visited the University there. He arranged his books and papers. He had with him, besides Collini, a copyist and a manservant,



both of whom he employed in literary work. He was now busy defending 'Louis XIV.' against La Beaumelle's criticisms. To be sure, 'Louis XIV.' was its own defence; but it was never in Voltaire's irritable and pugnacious nature to let the curs bark at his heels unheeded. He must be for ever kicking them or stinging them with his whip and so goading them to fresh fury. To sit serene above the thunder was quite impossible to this god: he was always coming down from his Olympus to answer the blasphemies of the mortals and to fight the meanest of them.

On April 18, after he had been in Leipsic rather less than a month, the travelling carriage stood once more at his door. The luggage which was heaped into it did not contain the book to which Frederick had alluded in his letter to Freytag. That luckless volume, in which were compiled the poetic effusions of Frederick the Great, free thinking, imprudent, and not a little indecent, had been given in charge of a merchant of Leipsic, who was to forward it, with many other of Voltaire's books, to Strasburg.

Chief among the royal poems was a certain 'Palladium,' imitated from the 'Pucelle,' but very much more ribald and insulting to the Christian religion; and, in that it abused other kings who might be dangerous foes, certainly not a work of which King Frederick would care to own himself the author. It had been secretly printed in the palace at Potsdam in 1751.

Voltaire hoped to meet at Strasburg, not only his books, but the person whom Frederick spoke of as 'that wearisome niece.' The criminal's next stopping place after Leipsic was Gotha. M. de Voltaire and suite intended to put up at the inn there, but were



not installed in it when the delightful Duchess of Saxe-Gotha, not the least charming of Voltaire's philosophic duchesses and with whom he had corresponded when he was at Cirey, begged him to be her guest, in her château. Forty years old, gentle, graceful, accomplished, with that love of learning without learnedness which was the peculiar charm of the women of the eighteenth century, Voltaire may well have found her, as he did find her, 'the best princess in the world.' 'And who—God be thanked,' he added piously, 'wrote no verses.' She received him and his attendants with a delighted hospitality. She had a husband, who was not of much account on the present occasion. And there was a Madame de Buchwald, who also had all that fascination which seems to have been the birth-right of the women of that time.

In all lives there are certain brief halcyon periods when one forgets alike the troubles that are past and the cares that are to come and enjoys oneself in the moment, defiant of fate, and with something of the *abandon* of a child. This month was such a period for Voltaire. After the fights and the worries of the three past years, he was peculiarly susceptible to the soothing flattery and the caressing admiration of this couple of gracious women.

He read them his 'Natural Law.' He read them new cantos of the 'Pucelle.' (Modesty was the lost piece of silver for which the woman of this period never even searched.) Nothing was bad about Gotha save its climate, said he. To please his dear Duchess and to instruct her son, the obliging Voltaire embarked here on a popular history of the German Empire from the time of Charlemagne.

'Annals of the Empire' is one of the least successful

of Voltaire's works. Truth compels the critic indeed to say that it comes very near to being hideously, preposterously, and unmitigatedly dull. It was written to order and without inspiration. It is laborious, monotonous, and long. That its conscientious list of Kings, Emperors, and Electors, and its neat little rhyming summary of each century, may have proved useful to the young gentleman they were designed to instruct, is very likely. But Voltaire did not put his soul in it. In the mechanical effort it required of his brain he was soon indeed to find great, and greatly needed, soothing. The month passed on winged feet. But Voltaire had to proceed, leisurely it might be, but still to proceed to Strasburg to embrace his niece.

He had had an idea of visiting the clever and delightful Margravine of Bayreuth with whom he so often corresponded; but all the circumstances considered, he thought she was too nearly related to Frederick, and that a visit to her might endanger the little liberty he had obtained.

No doubt, as he lumbered along in the great travelling carriage, he congratulated himself on at last getting out of Prussia, at once easily and gracefully.

He left Gotha on May 25, 1753.

He rested a night or two with the Landgrave of Hesse at Wabern, near Cassel. At Cassel, Baron Pollnitz of the suppers was staying; as Frederick's spy, Voltaire seems to have suspected. By May 30 the travelling party were at Marburg. After leaving there they passed through Fredeburg, where they visited the Salt Springs. And on May 31, 1753, Voltaire reached the 'Golden Lion' at Frankfort-on-Maine, meaning to proceed on his journey the next day.

## CHAPTER XXV

## THE COMEDY OF FRANKFORT

FREDERICK THE GREAT had the misfortune to suffer now from subordinates so loyal that they went beyond their master's commands, and officials with a blundering zeal not according to knowledge.

The second part of 'Akakia' had flung him into one of the greatest furies of his life. The unmeasured terms in which he wrote of Voltaire to his sister have been recorded. Wilhelmina's propitiating answer did not propitiate him. Voltaire was maddeningly and devilishly clever. The sting of the 'Akakia' supplements lay in part for Frederick the Great in the fact that he could hardly prevent himself from laughing at such an exquisite humour, nor withhold his admiration of such a dazzling and daring genius. But add to this, that in making a fool of his President, Voltaire had also made a fool of the President's friend and King; that that King had cringed to win Voltaire to Prussia, and cringed to keep him. Still extant were the royal letters filled with the wildest hyperbole of devotion and of admiration. He had stooped to entreat. He had licked dust to keep the Frenchman his property; and he had done it in vain. It may be forgiven him that, like Naaman the Syrian, he went away in a rage.

Before he went to Silesia he had caused to be written on April 11 that memorable order to Freytag, before alluded to, wherein he commanded Freytag to deprive Voltaire on his arrival at Frankfort of that Key, Cross and Order, all papers in the King's handwriting, and—'the book specified in the note enclosed.' Only—there was no note enclosed, and no book specified at all.

A conscientious and fussy old busybody was Freytag: worryingly anxious to do right, and fretfully and rightly suspecting himself to be no match for Voltaire. Back he writes to Potsdam on April 21, asking further instructions about that unspecified book; and 'If Voltaire says he has sent on his luggage ahead, are we to keep him a prisoner at Frankfort till he has brought it back?'

'Yes,' comes back the answer on April 29. 'Keep him in sight till the luggage is brought back and he has given to you the royal manuscripts, especially the book called "*Œuvre de Poésie*."'

For six weeks, while Voltaire was amusing himself with his Duchess and his 'Annals,' fussy Freytag awaited him. Voltaire spent the night of May 31 in perfect tranquillity at the inn of the 'Golden Lion.' On June 1, Freytag, Councillor Rucker, who represented one Councillor Schmidt who was ill, and Lieutenant Brettwitz called upon Voltaire at eight o'clock in the morning at the 'Golden Lion,' and in the name of his Prussian Majesty requested his Prussian Majesty's ex-guest to deliver up immediately all the royal manuscripts, the Key, the Cross and the Order.

It was not wonderful, perhaps, that at this request Voltaire flung himself back in his chair and closed his eyes, overcome. Even to Freytag's unemotional



vision the Frenchman appeared ill and was nothing better than a skeleton. Collini ransacked Voltaire's trunks at his order. He delivered up all the royal manuscripts—save one which he sent to Freytag the next morning, saying he had found it later under a table. The Key and the Ribbon—that Key which had long torn his pocket, and that Ribbon which had been a halter round his neck—he also gave to Freytag. He sent on to him in the evening his commission as King's Chamberlain. As for the '*Œuvre de Poésie*'—why, *that*, says Voltaire, I packed up with other books in a box, and, for the life of me, cannot tell you whether the box is at Leipsic or at Hamburg.

Considering the passionate nature of his desire to be out of this Prussia; considering his wretched health, which really did need Plombières waters, or some waters or some great change of scene and of air; considering the affront that was being put upon him; considering the fact that that '*Œuvre de Poésie*' was his own, a present from the King, corrected and embellished by M. de Voltaire himself, it must be conceded that he took the news that he was to be a prisoner at the Frankfort inn until that unlucky book was forthcoming, pretty philosophically. He did indeed beg vainly to be allowed to pursue his journey. It was not pleasant to have to sign a parole not to go beyond the garden of one's hotel; to have for host a man under oath not to let his guest depart. It was not pleasant to have three blundering German officials turning over one's effects for eight consecutive hours, from nine in the morning till five o'clock in the afternoon. The facts that Freytag—who certainly meant very well—confided Voltaire's health to the best doctor in the place, and offered the captive the pleasure of a drive with himself,

the great Freytag, the Resident, in the public gardens, were insufficient consolations for delay and indignity. Freytag signed a couple of agreements wherein he declared that as soon as the book arrived, Voltaire could go where he liked. One copy of the agreement Voltaire kept. He and Collini declared that Freytag spelled Poésie, *Poëshie*; and on the second copy which Voltaire sent to Madame Denis, to reassure her, her uncle wrote 'Good for the Œuvre de *Poëshie* of the King your master!' Voltaire could still joke; and still work. He was not all unhappy.

He went on with his 'Annals.' He received visitors—as a famous person whose extraordinary detention had already got wind in the town. He walked in the garden with Collini. He wrote several letters without even alluding to his present circumstances. He was still a laughing philosopher. He enjoyed that *Poëshie* joke immensely. He also enjoyed boxing the ears of Van Duren, once printer at the Hague and now retired to Frankfort, who waited on him with a bill thirteen years old. Collini found his master, as ever, good and benevolent.

Five days later he had begun to grow a little impatient. Worthy Freytag was shocked when he visited his captive on that fifth day of his detention, June 5, to hear him ask if he could not change his residence, and go and call on the Duke of Meiningen; and, worst of all, break out into invectives against that solemn old conscientious stupidity, the Resident himself. Freytag, not a little flurried, went home and wrote for more explicit commands from Potsdam. Since that first order, dated April 11, none had proceeded directly from Frederick. He was still away on his tour: and to Fredersdorff in Potsdam and Freytag in Frankfort, his too zealous servants, belongs most of the

dishonour and ridicule the affair heaped on the name of Frederick.

Freytag was no sooner out of the house than Voltaire, who still pursued his old, old policy of leaving no stone unturned, sat down and wrote a very cunning letter to the Emperor of Austria beseeching his interference in his, Voltaire's, behalf. The day before, on June 4, he had written a similar one to d'Argenson, showing how it would really be to the best interests of the French Ministry to come to his rescue. On June 7 he wrote to d'Argental of his detention with a calm and philosophy which, as has been well said, people keep as a rule for the misfortunes of others.

On the ninth day of his captivity, that is to say June 9, 1753, there drew up at the door of the 'Golden Lion' a post-chaise containing a very fat, hot, breathless and excited lady of uncertain years, who fell upon the captive's lean neck and fervently embraced him, crying out 'Uncle! I always said that man would be the death of you.'

Marie Louise Denis was at this time about three-and-forty years old. Idle, self-indulgent, and extravagant, she was a goodhumoured person enough if a vast appetite for pleasure were gratified to the full. Voluble, bustling, and impetuous; foolish, but not without a certain vulgar shrewdness; affectionate, until the objects of her affections were out of sight when she entirely forgot all about them; vain, greedy, and goodnatured; much too lazy to be long offended with anyone, and quite incapable of speaking the truth—Madame Denis was a type of woman which has never been uncommon in any age. So long as she was happy and comfortable herself, she was quite ready to allow her neighbours to be so too. She was a cordial hostess; and talked a great deal and at the very top of her voice. With



a mind as wholly incapable of real cultivation as was her heart of any great or sustained feeling, from long association with Voltaire she caught the accent of cleverness, as after living in a foreign country one catches the accent of a language though one may know nothing of its construction, its grammar, or its literature.

If Voltaire had been in many respects unfortunate in the first woman who influenced his life, he was a thousand times more so in the second. If Madame du Châtelet had had a shrewish temper, she had had transcendent mental gifts; Madame Denis had the shrew's temper with a mind essentially limited and commonplace. Madame du Châtelet had once loved Voltaire; Madame Denis never loved anything but her pleasures. From the first moment of her connection with him, his niece was a worry and a care to him—making him, as well as herself, ludicrous with her *penchant* for bad playwriting and her elderly coquetries. It is not insignificant that Longchamp, Collini, and Wagnière hated her from their souls. (Collini, indeed, politely praised her in his memoirs, written long after the events they chronicled, and roundly abused her in his letters written at the time.) Voltaire kept her with him, partly no doubt because the tie of relationship bound them. But his enemies may concede that if he had not been in domestic life one of the most generous, patient, goodhumoured, forbearing, and philosophic of men, he would have snapped that tie in the case of Louise Denis without compunction.

It must be briefly noted here that those enemies declare that there was another tie between Voltaire and Madame Denis than that of uncle and niece. But if there had been, why should it not have been



legalised by marriage? An appeal to the Pope and the payment of a certain sum alone were necessary. Voltaire was not too moral, but he was too shrewd, and had had far too much experience of the painful consequences of acting illegally, to do so when it was totally unnecessary. He had been, too, but a cold lover to Madame du Châtelet with her *éblouissante* personality. What in the world was there to make a decrepit uncle of nine-and-fifty fall in love with a lazy, ugly niece of forty-three, who bored him? The thing is against nature. The tone in which he speaks of Madame Denis in his letters—goodhumoured and patronising—is certainly not the tone of a lover. Add to this, that the foolish relict of M. Denis was always the victim of gallant *penchants* for quite other persons than Voltaire, now for d'Arnaud, now for Ximenès, presently for young secretary Collini, and a handsome major of twenty-seven.

The age was a vile one; and Voltaire was in it and of it. No woman, were she ever so old and ugly, could have been at the head of his house and escaped calumny. But he may be exonerated from being his niece's lover. It was a sin he had no mind to.

He was undoubtedly very sincerely glad to see her at the present moment. And if she was not quite heroic enough to keep herself from saying 'I told you so!' she was quite goodnatured enough to sympathise with her uncle, even if he had brought his misfortunes at least in part upon himself. This meeting, too, had been so long planned, written of, and delayed. Both uncle and niece—not yet knowing each other as fatally well as they were soon to do—had heartily desired it. One of the very first things practical Madame Denis did was to sit down and write on June 11 a very sensible and moving letter to Frederick the Great, which, if her

uncle did not help in its composition, is an example of the truth of the axiom that one intuition of a woman is worth all the reasoning of a man. It was not Madame Denis's fault that that appeal to Frederick to let Voltaire go free did not reach Frederick until it was too late to be of use. She had already implored the good offices of Lord Keith, who had been of Frederick's suppers, and was now in France as Prussian envoy; and the prudent Scotchman had replied advising her to recommend Uncle Voltaire to keep quiet, and to remember that 'Kings have long arms.' Nothing daunted, Madame Denis wrote to Keith again. This letter, too, though in the niece's hand, bears evidence of the uncle's brain. The energetic pair (Madame Denis declared in every letter that they were both very ill) further wrote to d'Argenson and Madame de Pompadour to lay before France the astonishing facts of their case.

It only remained for Madame Denis after this to try and cheer the captivity of the prisoner of the 'Golden Lion' and to help him entertain the illustrious local notables who came to call upon him.

Early on the morning of Monday, June 18, the chest containing that famous '*Œuvre de Poëshie*' was delivered at Freytag's house. 'Now we can go!' thinks Voltaire. He completed his preparations. He sent Collini to Freytag's house to be present at the opening of the parcel. But cautious Freytag was awaiting clearer orders from Potsdam: and would not open the case. Voltaire sent Collini many times during that morning; nay, many times in a single hour: and Freytag sent him away again. At noon comes a despatch to Freytag from Fredersdorff. 'Do nothing,' says that official, 'until the King returns here next Thursday,

when you shall have further orders.' And Freytag, in a note of the most excessive politeness, conveys this message to Voltaire.

Voltaire's patience had had eighteen days to run out: and the supply was pretty well exhausted. At his side was his niece dying to go, and anticipating, not unnaturally, that Frederick intended something very sinister indeed by these delays. Voltaire went to Freytag and asked to see Fredersdorff's despatch. And Freytag refused, in a rage. That night Madame Denis wrote to the Abbé de Prades—as the intimate of Frederick—telling him of this new insult and delay. And Voltaire resolved upon action.

Leaving Madame Denis to look after the luggage and await events at the 'Golden Lion,' on Wednesday, June 20, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Voltaire and Collini slipped out of the inn and went to another hostelry, called the 'Crown of the Empire,' where they got into a post-chaise which was returning to Mayence. A servant followed them as far as the 'Crown of the Empire' and put into the post-chaise a cash-box and two portfolios. But for the fact that one of the escaping criminals, sombrely dressed in black velvet for the occasion, dropped a notebook in the city and spent four minutes of priceless time looking for it, they would have been out of Frankfort and the jurisdiction of Freytag before that breathless and flurried official caught them up and arrested them, with the assistance of the officer at the Mayence gate, which they had actually reached.

It is not necessary to say that Voltaire did not submit to this arrest tamely. He argued with no little passion and adroitness. Collini supported all his statements impartially. 'The worst bandits could not have



struggled more to get away,' said unfortunate Freytag. But the Resident had might on his side, if not right. He left Voltaire and Collini under a guard of six soldiers and 'flew' back to the Burgomaster of Frankfort, who confirmed the arrest. When the unhappy official got back to the city gate, he found Voltaire had spent his time burning papers. What he did not know, was that Voltaire had further taken advantage of his absence to abstract a sheaf of manuscript from one of the portfolios and to give it to Collini, saying, 'Hide that somewhere about you.'

Freytag brought his prisoners back to the city in his carriage, which was surrounded by a guard of soldiers, and very soon by a crowd. He took them to the house of that Councillor Schmidt (whose office had been temporarily filled on June 1 by Councillor Rucker) because, said Freytag, the landlord of the 'Golden Lion' would not have Voltaire in his house any longer 'on account of his incredible meanness.' Freytag then made the prisoners give up the cash-box and their money. 'Count the money,' said Schmidt; 'they are quite capable of pretending they had more than they really had.' From Voltaire were also taken 'his watch, his snuff-box, and some jewels that he wears.' Collini recounts that Voltaire feigned illness to soften the hearts of his captors. But this very transparent ruse failed entirely; as might have been expected. After two hours' waiting, one Dorn, Freytag's clerk, a disgraced solicitor of Frankfort, took the pair to a low tavern called the 'Goat,' where Voltaire was shut up in one room guarded by three soldiers with bayonets; and Collini in another. Voltaire's cash-box and portfolios had been left in a trunk at Schmidt's, and the trunk padlocked.



Madame Denis, hearing of Voltaire's arrest, had flown to try the effect of feminine eloquence upon the burgomaster.

He replied by putting her under arrest at the 'Golden Lion'; and presently sent her, under guard of Dorn and three soldiers, to the 'Goat' tavern, where she was placed in a garret with no furniture in it but a bed; 'soldiers for *femmes de chambre*, and bayonets for curtains.' Madame Denis appears to have spent the night in hysterics. The miscreant Dorn actually persisted in taking his supper in her room and emptying bottle after bottle in her presence and treating her with insult. The truth was, Freytag and Dorn did not believe in her nieceship to Voltaire and mistook the poor lady for a wholly disreputable character.

Collini spent *his* night, dressed, on his bed. Beneath the shelter of its curtains he drew forth from his breeches that sheaf of manuscript Voltaire had given him at the Mayence gate. It was the manuscript of the 'Pucelle,' so far as it was then written.

If Voltaire spent *his* night in a rage, he had every excuse for it. At ten o'clock in the evening he wrote to that good friend of his, the Margravine, laying his desperate case before her and begging her to send his letter on to her brother. He had broken his parole—true; but not until Freytag had broken his written agreement that when that '*Œuvre de Poëshie*' arrived he should go where he listed. He had borne a most galling delay not impatiently. For being in possession of a book which had been given to him, he, his niece, and his servant had been hustled, jostled, and insulted. If the book was blasphemous, indecent, and a dangerous work for a king to have written, was that Voltaire's fault? He had but corrected its blunders and its

grammar. If its model was the 'Pucelle'—the royal author had chosen that model himself. Voltaire suffered for the King's imprudence and for the King's official's folly. He was in a situation not too common to him—he really was not the aggressor.

The following day, Thursday, June 21, the Potsdam mail arrived bringing orders dated June 16 from Frederick—just returned from his tour—that Voltaire, on giving his promise and a written agreement that he would send back the '*Poëshie*' to Freytag within a given time, and without making any copies of it, was to be allowed to go 'in peace and with civility.'

That is all very well, thinks fussy Freytag. But when the King wrote that, he did not know this Voltaire had set at naught his Resident's solemn authority and had had the audacity to try and escape. He must wait to go until we hear what the King's commands are when he knows of this abominable breach of discipline.

Voltaire, goaded to desperation, wrote again to the Margravine of Bayreuth, begging her to send to his Majesty a most indignant statement of the wrongs done to Madame Denis—the statement having been drawn up by that outraged lady herself. As a good niece, she also wrote again passionately, direct to the King, on behalf of her uncle. He himself implored Freytag in quite humble terms to at least let them go back to the 'Golden Lion,' which was a more decent habitation than the 'Goat'; and, besides, would save the prisoners from paying for two prisons.

A few hours after, he appealed again to the mercy of that harassed and unfortunate jailer. All these letters are of June 21. It must have been a busy day.

It is strange that at such a juncture Voltaire himself did not write direct to the King. It could not have been his pride that prevented him. If pride was an obstacle in the way of attaining his end, an impulsive Voltaire could always kick it aside. Besides, he stooped to entreat a Dorn and a Freytag. In answer to his requests Madame Denis and Collini were allowed to go out of doors. But Voltaire was kept to his room in that wretched 'Goat' and guarded by two sentinels as if he had been a dangerous criminal awaiting hanging. Four days went by. Then, on June 25, came clearer and more positive orders from Frederick to let the prisoners go. Frederick was sick of the business and ashamed of it. But still, argues Freytag, when he sent those orders, he did not know of the attempt to escape. So the only effect of them was that the guards were removed from the door, and Voltaire was put on his honour not to leave the room.

The chest of books from Strasburg had meanwhile been opened; and the '*Poëshie*' extracted therefrom. But for the punctilious idiocy of one dull official, Voltaire might long ago have been at his Plombières and have done with Prussia for ever. The very burgo-master began to pity him. Frankfort was near regarding him as a martyr. Freytag, a little nervous, splendidly allowed the captive the freedom of the whole inn; and then he and that captive fought tooth and nail over money matters. For Voltaire had not only endured the miseries of arrest and detention, but had had to pay their whole expenses. He and Collini swore they had been robbed of jewels, money, and papers, and of various trifles as well.

On July 5—after they had been detained thirty-five days—came sharp orders from Potsdam that Voltaire



was to be released at once. Even a Freytag could doubt and delay no more. On July 6 the party returned to the 'Golden Lion': where Voltaire called in a lawyer and laid before him a succinct account of the events of those five-and-thirty days. Collini completed their preparations for departure. On the very morning when they were going, the impetuous Voltaire caught sight of Dorn passing his door and rushed out at him with a loaded pistol. Collini intervened. They had been in scrapes enough already.

On July 7, 1753, Voltaire and Collini left Frankfort. That fighting, scrambling, wearying month of folly and indignity was over. The same night they reached Mayence-on-the-Rhine—a city which knew not Frederick. The day following, Madame Denis left Frankfort for Paris.

Nothing is more remarkable about the Frankfort affair than the moderation Voltaire, considering he was Voltaire, displayed in it. When the Margravine wrote on the subject to her brother and described Voltaire as 'intense and bilious' and 'capable of every imprudence,' the description was not unfair. When Frederick wrote to his sister and said plainly that Voltaire and Denis lied in their descriptions of the event and coloured it and embroidered on it to suit their own ends, he was not precisely lying, though he was not precisely truthful, himself. But leaving the account of Voltaire, Madame Denis, and Collini altogether alone, from the account of Freytag the prejudiced, it is proved that Voltaire behaved, all things considered, with a great deal of philosophy and an unusual amount of patience.

Why?

He was leaving Prussia—with enormous difficulty to be sure—but he *was* leaving it at last. He was



returning, as he hoped, to France. He had made a final trial of courts and kings—and found them wanting. Liberty was whispering and wooing him again—the siren he had loved and deserted, and whom he was to love again and desert no more. His blessed monotonous work at his ‘Annals’ made him ‘forget all the Freytags.’ For five hours a day, whether he was living in palaces or in prison, with princes or with jailers, he ‘laboured tranquilly’ at that book. The comic side of the situation appealed to him. He knew, or said he knew, that he deserved some of his misfortunes. And above all—far above all—the dream and the night were ending, and with the dawn of a new day came the courage, the fight, and the energy to win it.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE 'ESSAY ON THE MANNERS AND MIND  
OF NATIONS'

THE arrival of Voltaire at Mayence rang down the curtain upon the greatest act of one of the most famous dramas of friendship in the world. It left Frederick enraged : first of all with himself ; secondly, with blundering Freytag, whose blunders the King ostensibly approved, according to his principle, in a formal document written for that purpose ; and only thirdly with Voltaire. With his muse taught by that Voltaire, Frederick abused the teacher in spiteful epigrams, and then dealt him a blow which shook Voltaire's whole life, as a lover will kill the mistress who has been false to him not because he has loved her too little, but too much.

As for Voltaire, he was both angry and sorry. In that mean, world-famous story of their quarrel he must have known well enough that he had been too often most aggravating, *méchant*, and irrepressible. Yet that letter he wrote on July 9 from Mayence to Madame Denis, seen and meant to be seen by Frederick, gave a view of the situation not wholly false. The King 'might have remembered that for fifteen years he wooed me with tender favours ; that in my old age he drew me from my country ; that for two years I worked with him to perfect his talents ; that I

have served him well and failed him in nothing ; that it is infinitely below his rank and glory to take part in an academical quarrel and to end as my reward by demanding his poems from me at the hands of his soldiers.'

Adoring and quarrelling, passionately admiring and yearning for each other when they were apart, admiring and fighting each other when they were together—that is the history of the friendship of Frederick and Voltaire. If it be true that the great are no mates for common people, still less are they mates for each other. Even in fabled Olympus, gods could not live in peace with gods.

It is not unworthy of remark that their connection conferred far greater benefits on the King than on the commoner. Voltaire *had* consistently trained and taught the royal intellect from that first letter written in August 1736 to the Prussian heir-apparent. He had been such a master as kings do not often find—and his royal pupil had gained from him such advantages as kings are seldom wise enough to use.

But for Voltaire himself—for the most fruitful literary producer of any age—those three years in Prussia were comparatively barren and unprofitable. True, in 1751 'The Century of Louis XIV.' had appeared ; but all the materials for it had been collected, and by far the greater part of the book written, before Voltaire came to Prussia at all. The 'Poem on Natural Law' (not published till 1756), a few improvements to 'Rome Sauvée,' the beginnings of that 'magnificent dream,' 'The Philosophical Dictionary,' were, as has been seen (except 'Akakia'), his only other works written in Prussia. For a while the author of the 'Henriade' and the 'English Letters' was chiefly famous

as the enemy of d'Arnaud, Hirsch, and Maupertuis ; as the hero of the low comedy of Frankfort ; and as the guest ' who put his host's candle-ends into his pockets.'

If without Voltaire the glory of Frederick would have been something less glorious, without Frederick the great Voltaire would have been greater still.

Flourishing Mayence, with its Rhine river flowing through it, its fine castles, its fine company, its indifference to the opinion of Frederick, and its warm enthusiasm for Frederick's guest, friend, enemy, might well have seemed Paradise to Voltaire. He was free. His social French soul was delighted with many visitors. He worked hard too. He spent three weeks in 'drying his clothes after the shipwreck,' as he phrased it himself. But for one fear, he would have been happy. It was not only in Prussia that Frederick was Frederick the Great. His name was everywhere a power and terror. Why should prudent France embroil herself with the greatest of European sovereigns for the sake of clasping to her breast an upstart genius who was always making mischief whether he was at home or abroad, and who had been punished for his abominable, free, daring, unpalatable opinions a hundred times without changing them ?

Voltaire had arrived in Mayence on July 7, 1753. On July 9 he was writing to Madame Denis that letter for the public eye in which he gave *his* account of the affair with Frederick ; and went on to prove that he had never been a Prussian subject, or anything but a Frenchman to the bottom of his soul, which was true enough ; and to assert, the truth of which he felt to be very doubtful, that Frederick would be the first to ask of the King my master (I am still Gentleman-in-Ordinary, you will be pleased to



remember) that I may be allowed to end my days in my native land. Madame Denis was working hard to attain that same end in Paris : and thought herself likely to succeed. Her sufferings in Frankfort had been such that the emotional lady had to be bled four times in a week, she said. She still hoped, in italics, that her old prophecy that the King of Prussia would be the death of Uncle Voltaire would not be fulfilled after all ; and recalled Frankfort in terms so agitating that there was no wonder her uncle—who greatly over-estimated his niece's goodness in coming to him there—harped on the treatment she had received, on Freytag, Fredersdorff, and the 'Goat,' in every letter he wrote. In one at least, written at this period, he ominously signed himself Gentleman of the Chamber of the King of France. Voltaire was coming home.

He and Collini left Mayence on July 28 for Mannheim. where Charles Theodore, the Elector Palatine, had invited Voltaire to stay with him. They passed a night at Worms *en route*. Voltaire's spirits were light enough for him to pretend to be an Italian for the benefit of the Worms innkeeper, and make the supper what his secretary called 'very diverting.' At Mannheim, the Elector Palatine's Court being in the country, Voltaire spent a short time putting money matters in order, and changing his German money into French. He was nearly in his 'patrie' ; no wonder he was light-hearted. In a few days the Elector fetched him to Schwetzingen, his country house, where was held the gayest and most charming of little Courts. Voltaire always dined with the Elector, and after dinner read aloud to him one of his works. There were *fêtes* and concerts. The court theatrical company came to visit the author of 'Zaire' and 'Alzire,' of 'Mahomet' and

‘Mérope.’ Four of his own plays were acted. He was only too delighted to show the actors how to render this passage, and give to that character its true weight and significance. He began here (‘like an old fool,’ he said) a new love drama called ‘The Orphan of China.’ If liberty was the passion of his life, the drama was the pet child of his leisure. An agreeable fortnight passed away. The distinguished guest was taken to see the Elector’s library at Mannheim and presented to it the companion volume to that ill-omened ‘Poëshie’ of the King my master—Frederick’s ‘Memoirs of the House of Brandenburg.’

While unconscious Voltaire was still at Schwetzingen, training actors, or reading the ‘Annals’ to the Elector, d’Argenson, Voltaire’s old school friend and member of the French Cabinet, recorded in his diary ‘Permission to re-enter France is refused to M. de Voltaire . . . to please the King of Prussia.’

On August 16 Voltaire and Collini reached Strasburg and put up there at a poor little inn called the ‘White Bear,’ because it was kept by the father of a waiter at the inn at Mayence; and goodnatured Voltaire had promised to patronise it to oblige him. He moved shortly to a little house outside the city gate, and received there everyone of note in Strasburg.

He was still hard at work on the ‘Annals.’ He spent the evening sometimes with the agreeable Countess de Lutzelburg, who lived near. He took counsel about his ‘Annals’ with Schoepflin, the German historian. Altogether, he would have passed a couple of months quite after his heart—if—if—Madame Denis had been able to tell him that it was safe for him to proceed further into France. Alsace

was the border-line. On it was written, it seemed, 'Thus far shalt thou come, but no further.' But still—patience, patience! Voltaire did not yet despair. He knew nothing of that entry in d'Argenson's diary. But much bitter experience had taught him that discretion is the better part of valour. On October 2 he left Strasburg, and arrived the same evening at Colmar.

Colmar was a well-chosen spot for several reasons. One was that Schoepflin's brother, who was a printer, was going to print Voltaire's 'Annals' for him there. Another was that Colmar had plenty of agreeable literary society. And a third—and most important—it was very conveniently situated for the receipt of Madame Denis's communications. Within a drive of it was Lunéville. Two days' journey from it was Cirey. Its upper classes all spoke French. And though the Jesuits were no small power in it, Voltaire seems to have forgotten that unpleasant little fact, when he came. He went into modest rooms; and was his own housekeeper, with a young peasant girl called Babet, whose gaiety, simplicity, and volubility much entertained him, as cook. He played chess after dinner with Collini. His way of life delighted tastes always modest; and his health improved rapidly. He drew plans for his 'Orphan.' With a brilliant play he had successfully defied his enemies before. Why not again? But the dramatic muse required much wooing this time; and the most versatile writer in the world began compiling articles for the 'Encyclopædia' instead.

In this October Voltaire buried himself in the village of Luttenbach, near Colmar, for a fortnight, where he was happy enough proof-correcting his



'Annals' and still hoping for good news from France. On October 28 he came back to Colmar, had a fit of the gout, and, as usual, gaily bemoaned his ill-health in all his letters.

He still liked Colmar. He still thought he was creeping home. Prussia was behind him; and, though he was nearly sixty years old and always talked of himself as dying, he knew there was still a world before.

And then, in this December of 1753, Fate struck him one of those stunning blows she had too often dealt him.

Just as he was hoping for the best, as his friends in Paris were straining every nerve to smooth the way for his return, as he was laboriously wooing the histrionic muse that he might captivate the capital with a comedy; just as he had renounced Frederick and Prussia and remembered that he was Gentleman-in-Ordinary to his French Majesty and a Frenchman body and soul, and no Prussian after all, there appeared at the Hague, in a shamefully incorrect pirated edition, the most ambitious, the most voluminous, the most characteristic, and the most daring of all Voltaire's works, the 'Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations.'

If Madame du Châtelet 'despised history a little,' it had not the less been her and her lover's chief employment at Cirey. 'The Century of Louis XIV.' was not enough to occupy such an energy as Voltaire's. That cramped him to one time and to one country. And behold! there was the world to look back upon; the history of all nations to study—the progress of mankind to regard as a whole.

The 'Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations'



is of all Voltaire's works the one which has exerted the most powerful influence on the mind of men. On July 10, 1791, when his body was taken to Paris and placed on the ruins of the Bastille on the very spot where he himself had been a prisoner, on the funeral car were written the memorable words, 'He gave the human mind a great impetus: he prepared us for freedom.' That line might have served as the motto of his great essay. It prepared men for freedom. It records the history of human progress from Charlemagne to Louis XIII. It was the first history which dealt not with kings, the units, but with the great, panting, seething masses they ruled; which took history to mean the advance of the whole human race—a general view of the great march of all nations towards light and liberty. It was the first history which struck out boldly, and hit prejudice and oppression a staggering blow from which they have not yet recovered. Yet its style is infinitely frank, gay, and daring. It is such easy reading, so light, clear, and sarcastic. It is the one book of its kind the frivolous will finish for pleasure. It has such a jesting manner to hide its weighty matter. It is infinitely significant; and yet sounds as if it were simply meant to be amusing. It is said that Voltaire put it into such a form to overcome Madame du Châtelet's dislike of history. But it was his lifelong principle as a writer that to be dull is the greatest of all errors. He was always wishing that Newton had written vaudevilles; and praying that his own taste might never be 'stified with study.' What Frederick the Great called the 'effervescence of his genius' bubbles over in the 'Essay on the Manners and Mind of Nations,' as in all his works. But it must be remembered that easy reading means

hard writing; and that this 'picture of the centuries,' this 'history of the human mind,' needed, as its author declared, 'the patience of a Benedictine and the pen of a Bossuet.' When he wrote 'Finis' on the last page of the last edition in 1775, the book numbered six volumes, and was in every sense the greatest of its author's works. Parton has justly said that to it 'Grote, Niebuhr, Gibbon, Colenso, and especially Buckle, are all indebted.' That it is full of mistakes which any fairly well-educated person of to-day could easily correct, does not make it a less extraordinary production for the age in which it was produced. That it is now obsolete, only proves how thoroughly it accomplished its aim. The great new truths for which Voltaire fought with his life in his hand are the common-places and the truisms of to-day.

But then he made them so.

Jean Néaulme, the pirate publisher at the Hague, said he had bought the manuscript from a servant of Prince Charles of Lorraine—Charles having obtained it either by persuasion or treachery from Frederick the Great. Voltaire had given a manuscript copy of the book to his royal friend. In his present state of mind, it was only natural he should suspect Frederick of foul play.

However this might be, the thing was printed. It was called, and miscalled, 'An Abridgment of Universal History.' It was filled from end to end with astounding and, very often, wilful blunders. It confused the eighth century with the fourth and the twelfth with the thirteenth, and Boniface VIII. with Boniface VII. The unhappy author, with tears in his eyes, called it 'the disgrace of literature.' He had, of course, never corrected the proofs. Since writing that first

manuscript, intrusted to Frederick, he had written other manuscripts wherein he had not only modified but actually changed his first ideas. This time at least, when he followed his old plan of loudly disavowing the work, he had much justification. The 'pretended Universal History,' as he called it, *was* his 'Essay,' but so mauled and disfigured he may be forgiven for refusing to acknowledge it.

But far stronger than any merely literary reasons for denying such a paternity was the bold, free-spoken character of this son of his genius. Voltaire knew that no work he had ever written would so bar his way back to his country as this one. Every line glowed with some truth hateful to Boyers and to tyranny. There was never any mistaking a Voltaire's meaning. Now, more than ever, he had written in luminous words which, like sunbeams, being much condensed, greatly burnt. His principles were as lucid as daylight. There was hardly a phrase which would not draw upon him 'the implacable wrath of the clergy.' How could he forget in it such remarks as the following—'Rome has always decided for the opinion which most degraded the human mind and most completely annihilated human reason'?

'Whoso thinks makes others think.'

How could he help remembering that he had taken the Protestant Reformation as a new tyranny—not an emancipation; that he had degraded war 'from the highest to the lowest place in the historian's regard;' and had declared that 'Tyrants sacrifice the human race to an individual'—a dangerous sentence in itself, and which that abominable pirate publisher had rendered a thousand times more dangerous by misquoting as 'Kings sacrifice the human race to a caprice'? He



had offended every powerful class, and every cherished prejudice. But action was now, not less than ever, his *forte*. If it could not save him from his enemies, it could save him from himself—from that worst combination, idleness with misery.

On December 28, 1753, he wrote to Néaulme, and told M. Jean his candid opinion about that edition. He also wrote not a little piteously, a very few days after, to his old friend Madame de Pompadour—the publication of that ‘Essay’ forcing him to prove, he said, his innocence to his master the King—of France.

But it was in vain he reminded Louis XV., through her, that he had spent years of his life in writing the history of Louis’ predecessor; ‘and alone of the Academicians had had his panegyric translated into five languages.’ That surly Bourbon, with that intuition which saved his degraded race a hundred times from earlier and completer ruin, saw in the genius of Voltaire the fuse which was to set ablaze the gunpowder of sedition and misery with which his France was undermined. He turned to Madame de Pompadour and said that he ‘did not wish’ Voltaire to return to Paris. It is not difficult to imagine the exile’s state of mind. ‘I have no comfort but in work and solitude,’ he wrote; and to Cideville on January 28 of this new year 1754: ‘My dear Cideville, at our age one must mock at everything and live for self. This world is a great shipwreck. *Sauve qui peut!* but I am far from the shore.’

On what shore would he be allowed to land if he could gain one?

Colmar, he soon discovered, was ‘a town of Hot-tentots governed by German Jesuits.’ On February 17



he wrote a very meek, artful letter to one of those Jesuits, Father Menou (whom he had known at the Court of Stanislas and of whom he speaks in his 'Memoirs' as 'the boldest and most intriguing priest I ever knew'), pleading his cause with him. He pleaded it, too, with the Archbishop of Paris through M. de Malesherbes. But it was all in vain. The Church was as offended as the King.

On February 20, pushed to extremity, and neither able to leave nor to stay in this wretched Colmar without the sanction of his French Majesty, the unhappy man asked d'Argenson to 'sound the King's indulgence'—to know if he might travel.

On February 22 he called in two notaries, who compared the correct manuscript of his 'Essay' with the two incorrect volumes published at the Hague; and drew up a formal declaration in which they affirmed that the Dutch edition was 'surreptitious, full of errors, and worthy of all contempt,' and that the real 'Essay' was at least eight times longer than the false one. But that also was useless. Neither Court nor Catholic meant to be convinced.

Then, as if her uncle's cup of misfortune were not brimming over already, niece Denis's bad management and extravagance with his money in Paris forced him to appoint an agent to look after her affairs; and she, living on his bounty, turned and accused him of avarice. No public wrongs are so cruel as private ones. Beside Madame Denis's ingratitude, excommunication, said Voltaire, would have been a light penalty. He had given her an ample fortune—a larger one than old Maître Arouet had left his Voltaire. Her reproaches were the unkindest cut of all.

That they were singularly ill-timed may be gathered

from the fact that sixty thousand francs of Voltaire's income were derived from annuities or bonds of the City of Paris, of which at any moment angry Louis might deprive him, by a line of writing and the royal signature, for ever. Two kings were now his enemies. Jesuitical Colmar hated him. Prussia and France were barred to him. Denis had turned upon him. The Pompadour was helpless. The 'Essay,' filled with blunders and pregnant with daring and danger, was all over Europe. Such was Voltaire's position in the month of March 1754.

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